



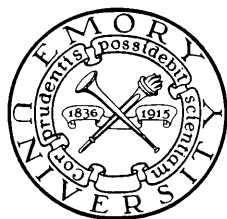
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By George R. Sims



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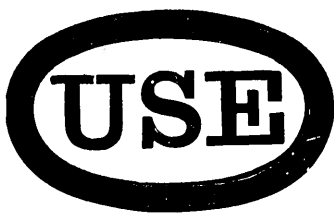
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## SCENES FROM THE SHOW



# SCENES FROM THE SHOW

BY

GEORGE R. SIMS

AUTHOR OF

'MARY JANE'S MEMOIRS,' 'MY TWO WIVES,' 'MEMOIRS OF A LANDLADY,  
ETC.



London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE BLUE DOMINO - - - -	I
II. THE LOST EXPLORER - - - -	31
III. BLIND - - - -	56
IV. 'OPKINS - - - -	79
V. THE GRASS WIDOW - - - -	102
VI. THE HUNDRED-POUND NOTE - - - -	127
VII. THE SENIOR PARTNER - - - -	152
VIII. A FAMILY GATHERING - - - -	174
IX. MISS MONTRESSOR - - - -	199
X. THE JUDGE'S WIFE - - - -	224



# SCENES FROM THE SHOW

## I.

### *THE BLUE DOMINO.*

‘ You don’t know me ?’

Hugh Folkard turned and looked hard at the lady who had whispered these words in his ear as he stood leaning against a pillar watching the crowd of masqueraders who were comporting themselves as merrily as an English crowd could possibly do under the circumstances. The genius of fancy dress does not attain its height on this side of the Channel. The moment you dress an Englishman in anything which he is not accustomed to wear he feels awkward. Mask him, in addition, and he cannot shake off the impression that he is making an exhibition of himself.

Hugh Folkard was in the scene, but not of it.

He had come to Covent Garden, as hundreds of other clubmen had come, simply to pass an evening and 'see the fun.' He was in ordinary evening dress, and had just begun to feel rather bored, when his languid interest in the proceedings was quickened by the challenge of the fair unknown.

He did not recognise the voice, but he fancied that the owner of it was endeavouring to disguise it.

A prolonged scrutiny failed to reveal any feature which would serve as a clue to identity. The lady was dressed in a blue domino, and the face was concealed by a white satin 'loup,' the lace of which fell rather lower than usual and concealed everything but the chin.

'No—I—er—I really don't,' said Folkard.

'And you can't guess?'

'No—I—I can't guess; won't you tell me?'

'No, that would spoil the fun,' said the lady in the blue domino, 'but I will tell you who you are.'

'That should be easy if you know me. I am not masked.'

'Your face is not; but your heart is.'

'Really—I—er—didn't know that was possible. I should have thought that sort of thing over one's

heart would have caused rather an uncomfortable feeling.'

'Perhaps it does.'

A shade passed over Hugh Folkard's face. There was something in the intonation with which these words were spoken which made him uneasy. He fancied that perhaps with a few more questions he might be able to get a clue to the mystery.

'Well,' he said, 'as you say that you know so much about me and my heart, perhaps you won't mind proving that your knowledge is not assumed.'

'Not at all,' replied the Blue Domino, 'but I must whisper ; you wouldn't like everyone to know as much as I do.'

Hugh Folkard shrugged his shoulders.

'I don't think it would matter,' he said. 'Come, I have the bump of curiosity very largely developed, and I am anxious to hear something about myself, especially as I fancy it is something I never knew before. If you really know me, a very few words will prove it. Give me a sign by which I may recognise myself.'

The Blue Domino, her dark eyes flashing through her mask, looked quickly round to see that no one was very close to them—then, bringing her face close to Hugh Folkard's, she whispered :



‘We haven’t met for five years; the last time you saw me was on your wedding-day. I think you know me now; if you don’t I’ll tell you something else that may help you to fix me in your mind. Your wife died a year ago. Two days before she died she managed to write a few words and put them in an envelope, and she got the nurse to post them. Your wife’s last letter, a letter posted unknown to you, was addressed to me. I have it still, but I have never let anyone know its contents because, Frank Marden, I love you still.’

Hugh Folkard listened in blank astonishment. When the lady had finished, it was a moment or two before he could find words to reply.

‘I assure you,’ he said, ‘you have made a mistake—I——’

‘It won’t do, Frank,’ said the unknown. ‘I know you.’ Then she bowed her head with mock solemnity, and, moving rapidly away, was soon lost in the crowd.

Hugh Folkard stood dumfounded for a moment, then he laughed aloud so heartily that people standing near him stared at him.

‘By Jove!’ he said to himself, ‘I never anticipated such an adventure as this when I came to the ball. I come unmasked, and I’m mistaken for

a widower, and a lady in a blue domino tells me that my name is Frank Marden, and that she loves me still. I must tell the fellows this, it will amuse them; but they won't believe me. They'll think I've made it up. Frank Marden—I must remember that name. I might meet the fellow some day, and then I could have some fun.'

Hugh Folkard's astonishment was perfectly genuine. The Blue Domino had mistaken him for somebody else, and had gone away thoroughly under the impression that his denial was an attempt to impose upon her. He told his odd adventure to two or three men of his acquaintance and to one lady. The men laughed, the lady looked serious. She was his *fiancée*, and she didn't like the idea of any woman talking to her future husband in such a manner, and telling him that 'she loved him still.'

'But, my dear Madge,' exclaimed Hugh, as he noticed the cloud upon his sweetheart's face, 'it was a mistake. She called me Frank Marden, and thought I was a man whose wife died a year ago. My name is Hugh Folkard, and I haven't been married yet, you know, at all.'

Madge Hetherington shook her head.

'Of course I know it was a mistake, Hugh dear ;

but for this woman, who told you she loved you, to mistake you for another man, you must be very like that man. I can't understand a girl making a mistake in the man she loves, unless the resemblance is very extraordinary.'

'I suppose I must be like the fellow,' replied Hugh, laughing; 'but I can't help that, you know, and so long as he didn't murder his wife, and I am not mistaken for him by the police and brought up at the Old Bailey, I can't see that it particularly matters.'

Folkard's attempt to treat the matter jokingly failed miserably. The picture that he drew of what might happen only made Madge more serious still.

'You—you don't think, Hugh, anything like that would happen?' she said nervously, laying her hand upon his arm.

'My darling, how silly you are! as if such a thing were possible! But as we don't know that this man who is like me did murder his wife, that's only nonsense, and, after all, the whole story may have been an invention of this woman's. It may have been just her idea of a practical joke at a masked ball. Come, you mustn't think any more about it; what shall I bring you from Italy?'

‘Must you go?’

‘Yes, dear, my father would never forgive me if I did not meet him at Brindisi; remember, he has been in India ten years, and after such a long separation as that I mustn’t appear an undutiful son. I shall only be away a fortnight, and then we shall come back together, and I shall bring him to see you. He knows all about you from my letters, and I’m certain that he will think himself the luckiest father in the world to have such a daughter-in-law. Good-bye, dear; God bless you!’

‘Hugh, let me walk a little way with you. Mamma is not going out to-day. She is not well enough, and I want a little air. I—I feel faint.’

‘You dear little goose! you don’t mean to say that silly nonsense about that girl in the Blue Domino has really worried you so much as that?’

‘Yes, but I shall shake it off; let me come a little way with you.’

‘Of course, I shall be delighted; come for a walk in the Park, and I’ll walk back here with you.’

‘Will you? I should like it so much. I won’t be a minute in getting ready.’

Madge ran upstairs to tell her mother, who was an invalid and often kept her room for days together, that she was going out with Hugh, and

the young man was left in the pretty little drawing-room alone.

‘Poor little girl!’ he said to himself; ‘fancy her taking this silly business so to heart, as if there was anything in it! Well, we shall be married this autumn. My father is sure to do the thing handsomely for me, he has promised me in his letters that he will; and Madge will be stronger and happier, and won’t give way to these odd fancies that she has at times now. She has lived too long with an invalid, poor girl! and I’m sure her mother must be fearfully trying. I’m not sure that she doesn’t rather resent my taking her daughter away. She has made every objection she could, and asked the oddest things about my people, and wasn’t satisfied until she’d written out to the governor herself and received his reply. I wonder how I shall get on with him. Ten years is a long time for father and son to be separated, but the governor would never hear of my going out to India to him, though I wanted to.’

Hugh Folkard was looking out of the long drawing-room window as he had this quiet little ‘think.’ He didn’t look at anything in particular for a time, but suddenly his attention was attracted by a young lady on the opposite side of the street.



She was a tall, handsome girl of about five-and-twenty, dark, and slightly foreign-looking. She was walking with an elderly lady dressed in black, who leaned slightly on her arm as if for support.

They were walking past Mrs. Hetherington's house, when the elderly lady called her companion's attention to the flower-boxes, which were very tastefully arranged. The young woman looked up, and her eyes met those of Hugh Folkard.

She started, gave a little gasp of astonishment, then bowed slightly and continued her walk.

Hugh bowed in return, but he couldn't remember ever having met the lady before. Only the black, flashing eyes seemed familiar to him. 'Someone I've been introduced to somewhere, I suppose,' he said to himself, 'but why the deuce did she start so when she saw me?'

At that moment Madge came into the room dressed for her walk. Hugh was curious to see the lady who had bowed to him again. The old lady was walking very slowly. He would be able to catch them if he went after them at once. He didn't say anything to Madge, because he didn't know, in her nervous, over-wrought condition, how she would take it, but when they were outside he walked rather quickly.

He walked on the other side of the road until he caught them up, and then, by turning his head slightly as he passed, he was able to get a good look at the young lady.

No. He certainly did not remember ever having met her. His curiosity was piqued. He couldn't cross the road with Madge and say to the other young lady, 'I beg your pardon, but who are you?' so he gave a half-smile of assumed recognition, and, turning to Madge, was soon engrossed with her.

The walk in the Park lasted about an hour. It was a fine warm spring day, and Hugh and Madge sat down for a little while and enjoyed the quiet beauty of the scene.

When they got back, Hugh, after seeing Madge in, and bidding her once more good-bye, was about to leave, when one of the servants came to him.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' she said, 'but soon after you had gone a young lady and an old lady called and asked if a Mr. Marden lived here.'

'What!' exclaimed Folkard.

'If a Mr. Marden—a Mr. Frank Marden, I think the young lady said—lived here, sir.'

Hugh Folkard was dumfounded. In a moment it flashed upon him that the young lady who had

looked up at him was the woman in the blue domino whom he met at the fancy ball.

As soon as he had recovered from his astonishment he asked the servant for further particulars.

The servant explained that she had told the ladies there was no such person in the house, and then they asked her who the gentleman was who had just gone out with a young lady

‘And you told them?’

‘Well, sir, I didn’t think there would be any harm, and I gave them your name.’

‘And then?’

‘There wasn’t any more said, sir; they thanked me, and went away’

‘You—you haven’t said anything to Miss Hetherington about this?’

‘No, sir; not yet.’

‘Then oblige me by not doing so. I have been mistaken for someone else, that’s all; but it might alarm Miss Hetherington—you know how nervous she is.’

‘Yes, sir; I won’t say anything, sir.’

Hugh Folkard left the house a prey to a variety of emotions. What did this extraordinary business mean? He must evidently be very like this mysterious Frank Marden, for these people, having

seen him at the window, had come to inquire after him by that name.

‘As soon as I come back from Italy,’ he said to himself, ‘I’ll take measures to find out Mr. Frank Marden. Some day he may be necessary to me if I want to prove my own identity.’

Then he laughed. After all, it was too absurd a thing to be taken seriously.

\* \* \* \* \*

A fortnight later Hugh Folkard returned, bringing his father with him. Colonel Folkard was a magnificent specimen of the Anglo-Indian. Tall, burly, his handsome face, bronzed with the sun, was set out in conspicuous relief by his iron-gray hair. The night after their return they were sitting together in Hugh’s chambers. The next day Colonel Folkard was to be introduced to his son’s *fiancée*. Hugh had led the conversation up to his approaching marriage.

‘Well, my boy,’ said his father, ‘I’m sure that she’s all that you say. I shall make you a handsome addition to your present income, and I hope you’ll be happy.’

‘As happy as you were with my mother—the mother I can scarcely remember.’

A shade passed over the Colonel’s face. For a

moment he hesitated, then, laying aside the cigar he was smoking, he said quietly :

‘ Hugh, I think the time has come when I ought to tell you a family secret. You may have to hear it some day, and you had better hear it from me.’

‘ A family secret !’

‘ Yes ; and when I have told it you, I hope you will think no worse of me—or of your mother. I should not tell it you now, but that the business which has brought me to England is connected with it, and I do not well see how I can do that business satisfactorily and keep it from you.’

‘ Go on, sir.’

‘ When I went to India first, thirty years ago, I was a married man.’

‘ You were married to my mother ?’

‘ No ; I had made a foolish marriage in England. I had been duped and trapped into giving my name to an adventuress. I found out my mistake in a very short time. I made my wife an allowance, and went abroad. In India I met a girl whom I would have given the world to call my wife. She was the daughter of a man who once held a good position in the Indian Civil Service, but who had ruined himself by drink. Her home was a miser-



able one. Her father, in his mad fits of intemperance, terrified her; one night he struck her in my presence: I interfered to protect her, and she left his roof with me—and—and—well, Hugh, it's a sad story, but I've begun it, and I'll finish it—she shared my home. She was as dear to me as though she had been my wife, but I could not give her that title. A son was born to us——'

'Good God, father!' exclaimed Hugh, leaping to his feet, 'do you mean to say that I am——'

'No; listen. A year after the birth of that son I received the news of my wife's death. Then I married the girl who had given her life and honour to my keeping. It was two years afterwards that you were born.'

'And the other son, this brother that I have never heard of until now?'

'Patience! When he was born I and your mother were living up country in an out-of-the-way place where nobody knew us. When I was free I felt that our marriage ought to be as public a one as possible—that it should be advertised and made known, for my wife's sake. But the child was a difficulty. I persuaded your mother to let it be put out to nurse, and we went to Bengal, where we were married. There were people there who knew

us both ; to have brought the child into our home would have been to acknowledge the past, and we hesitated. Then you were born, and our difficulty was a greater one than ever. At last we decided that the boy should be sent to England to some friends of your mother's, who promised to take care of him as their own son. I paid liberally for the care and education of the child, and by them he was brought up as their adopted son. When he was thirteen and you were ten, your mother died, and I came to England with you, and left you here, as you know. I went to see your brother, but his acknowledged parents begged me not to reveal the relationship. They looked upon him now as their own. Each time that I came to England to see you I saw your brother, but he never knew who I was.'

'And now—he still does not know? You are going to see him again?'

'I don't know. It is about him that I have come. A few years ago the old people who had adopted him died, and he came into their money—a few thousand pounds. Then he left the neighbourhood, and went abroad. This I gathered from the inquiries made by my solicitor, and from that time I have heard nothing of him. I want to find

him now because, after all, he is my son, and as you are going to be married, and I must provide for your future and the future of your children, I ought to know in what position he is—whether he is rich or poor, whether he is alive or dead. I have tried every means to trace him; now I am determined to advertise. See, here is what I propose to have inserted in the principal papers.’

Colonel Folkard drew a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to his son. Hugh took it and glanced at it, and then let it fall from his hand.

The advertisement was a request for Frank Marden to communicate with a firm of solicitors in London.

‘Father,’ Hugh exclaimed, as the Colonel looked at him in astonishment, ‘was the name by which my brother was known Frank Marden?’

‘Yes, his mother’s maiden name was Marden; that is the only name he has a right to.’

Frank Marden! This, then, was the secret of the resemblance. This man for whom Hugh had been mistaken, this man whose wife had two days before her death posted a letter to another woman betraying perhaps some ghastly secret concerning her husband, was his brother. The mystery of the

Blue Domino was as clear as daylight to Hugh Folkard now.

\* \* \* \*

That advertisement duly appeared. It was more necessary now than ever that they should ascertain Frank Marden's whereabouts. When Hugh had told his father everything, Colonel Folkard had the same idea as his son—that there was a mystery connected with Frank Marden which had caused him to disappear.

The Colonel understood the mistake of the Blue Domino at once. As children the resemblance between the two sons had been a remarkable one. It was evident that the resemblance had continued in their manhood.

\* \* \* \*

It was the evening before Hugh Folkard's wedding-day, and still there was no news of the Colonel's missing son. Hugh's father had grown to love his future daughter-in-law, and was a constant visitor at her mother's house. He was dining there this evening, but Hugh, who was expected, had sent a letter by a messenger saying that they were not to wait for him—he would come on later; an important business matter had suddenly cropped up which required his attention.

As he would be leaving town the following day for a long honeymoon on the Continent, Hugh's letter caused no anxiety—his explanation was a natural one, and was readily accepted. But he had not dared to tell the truth.

That afternoon, while he was in his chambers, the servant had brought him a card. A young lady wished to see him on a matter of great importance. Hugh looked at the card, but the name, Miss Violet Hearne, was unknown to him. He told his servant to show the lady in. Immediately she entered the room his heart gave a great bound, and his face grew pale. It was the lady he had first seen in a blue domino.

As the servant closed the door, Hugh motioned his visitor to a chair, but she remained standing.

‘Frank,’ she said quickly, ‘I hear you are to be married to-morrow.’

‘My name is not Frank!’ he gasped; ‘my name is Hugh Folkard.’

‘That is the name you have assumed,’ replied the young lady, ‘but your name is Frank Marden. How can you deny it to me? You haven’t changed so much in a few years.’

‘Well,’ stammered Hugh, thinking that he had

better know the whole tale now, 'and if I am Frank Marden, what then?'

'Only this—that if you go up to the altar to-morrow to wed another woman, I will hand your dead wife's letter to the police, and have you arrested as you leave the church.'

'And what is there in my dead wife's letter that I can be arrested for?' stammered Hugh Folkard, a great agony of fear at his heart.

'Can't you guess what was in it—the truth, the truth written by her to me, the woman you jilted for her! With her dying hand she wrote the words which gave you into my living one. She wrote to me asking me to forgive her for having taken you from me, and telling me that I need not bear her malice any more; that her life had been a hell, and that she was dying now of poison—poison administered to her with devilish cunning by you, her husband.'

'Great God! can this be true?'

'Can it be true!—you know it is true. I have her letter still; but to-morrow, unless you give up this girl, I will read it publicly as you stand at the altar—I will stop the wedding, and I will tell them why.'

Hugh Folkard, when he realized the truth,

stagged and fell into a chair. At last he knew the secret of his brother's mysterious disappearance. His brother had poisoned his wife, and had afterwards fled terror-stricken and left no trace behind.

But gradually he recovered himself, and with an effort rose to his feet again.

'Miss—Miss Hearne,' he said, 'I am going to be perfectly honest with you. Whether the unfortunate lady was poisoned I cannot say. Knowing nothing of the facts, I cannot form an opinion—she may have been under the impression she was, and that's how I prefer to look at the matter. I cannot on the evidence of a letter written under such circumstances believe that my brother was a murderer.'

'Your brother!'

'Yes, my brother!'

'I expected you would be prepared with some such story as this,' exclaimed Violet Hearne; 'but you have not arranged the details at all cleverly. When I met you at the masked ball and called you Frank Marden, you didn't explain my mistake then by saying he was your brother. You pretended that you had never heard of such a person.'

'I didn't know of his existence then——'

‘Indeed! that is strange, isn’t it? Frank Marden is your brother, his father was your father, your mother was his mother, and you suddenly remember his existence when you are charged with being Frank Marden yourself. And if you are brothers, isn’t it rather odd that your name isn’t Marden, too?’

Hugh hesitated. How could he trust this woman with the buried secret of his father’s life—with his dead mother’s honour?

She noticed his hesitation, and drew her own inference from it.

He recovered himself a little. ‘Miss Hearne,’ he said, ‘I assure you that I am speaking the truth. We ourselves, my father and I, do not know what has become of Frank. Since my father’s return from India he has been advertising for his son in the English papers. You who are so interested in finding Frank must have noticed them.’

‘Oh yes, I saw the advertisements, and I quite understood them. They were probably inserted by you with an excellent object—to make me believe that Frank Marden had disappeared or was dead. I know better than that. Frank Marden is here, in this room now. His secret is safe with me so long as he does not make another woman his wife.



The girl you are going to marry is rich. She might die too, and leave you rich and free again.'

'Then you absolutely refuse to believe me? Is there no way in which I can convince you of your error? Will you see my father?—he is here in London. I will fetch him, if you like, and you shall remain here.'

'No, I don't trust you now. I don't know who you might bring to me as your father. Someone, probably, quite prepared to endorse every word of your little romance.'

'Then, what will you do?'

'I have told you—nothing if you will give that girl up. But if you marry her I will keep my word, and place this letter in the hands of the police.'

'One word!'

'No, I have nothing further to say.'

The girl gave him one glance, half of pity, half of contempt, and before Hugh had recovered himself sufficiently to plead to her again she was gone.

Hugh Folkard sank back into a chair, and gazed vacantly at the space before him. What was to be done? The first thing was to tell his father at once. He must decide. This woman might

hesitate to keep her threat, but if she did keep it the whole story would have to be told.

With a heavy heart he set out for the home of the girl who to-morrow was to be his bride.

There were many inquiries as to the nature of the business which had detained him, but he fenced with the questions, and he said nothing till he and his father were on their road home to his chambers.

Then he told his father all that had happened. Colonel Folkard was horrified. His worst fears were confirmed. But on the point of telling Madge he was firm. She must know. She must know everything, horrible as it was, and he himself would tell her in the morning.

At nine o'clock the following morning the old Colonel went to the bride's house and asked to see her. Pale and trembling, wondering what such a strange visit might mean, Madge came down to him, and then with a great effort he told her what had brought him there.

When he had finished it, the young girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes, and said, 'Tell Hugh he can wait for me at the altar. I shall be there at the appointed time.'

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The people who assembled to witness the marriage of Hugh Folkard and Madge Hetherington noticed that the bridegroom was almost as pale as the bride, and that the bridegroom's father was strangely nervous. One or two shrugged their shoulders and whispered to each other that the principal parties seemed anything but happy. When the clergyman commenced the marriage service Hugh's heart almost stood still. Was the woman there? what would she say? what would she do?

He was not long in doubt. Hardly had the first few words of the service been read, when a woman's voice rang across the church. It only said one word, 'Stop!' but the effect was electrical. Several women gave a stifled scream, the men started, and every eye was turned in the direction from which the sound proceeded. The bride would have fainted and fallen to the ground had not the Colonel caught her in his arms. Hugh gripped his hands nervously together, and with a quivering lip whispered to the clergyman:

'We will go into the vestry.' Then taking the bride from his father's arm, he whispered, 'Courage, dear!' and half carried, half led her from the altar.

The clergyman, as soon as the bride and bride-

groom had disappeared, looked round the church, and saw a woman coming towards him.

‘It was I who said “Stop!”’ she said, still in the same quiet voice. ‘Shall I tell you why—here?’

‘No; follow me.’

When the vestry door had closed upon the principal actors in this unusual scene, the pent-up excitement of the spectators found vent. People forgot they were in church, and turned to each other and discussed the situation audibly.

Presently the clergyman returned, and begged everybody to leave the church quietly, which they did, but gathered in groups outside, waiting to see or to hear something which might, perhaps, give a key to the enigma.

The relatives of the bride—her mother was too great an invalid to be there—remained in the pews. They did not speak. They waited in silence—pale, terrified, hardly able to believe that such a dreadful thing had happened, and hoping that it might be nothing serious after all—the freak of a jealous woman, perhaps. No one guessed the truth.

Inside the vestry, in the presence of the unwedded bride, Violet Hearne had stated that she interrupted the marriage because the man who described himself as Hugh Folkard, bachelor, was

in reality Frank Marden, widower, and she accused Frank Marden of having poisoned his first wife.

Colonel Folkard, pale and agitated, listened silently, and then, grasping his son's hand, began in a low voice to tell the clergyman the true story ; but he had hardly mastered his voice sufficiently to utter the first few words, when one of the church attendants entered and told him that someone wanted to see him at once.

The Colonel followed the attendant, and found that the person who wished to see him was the London solicitor who had been employed to discover the whereabouts of Frank Marden.

‘I thought it best to come on here,’ said the solicitor, who had no knowledge of what had happened in the church, ‘as there is no time to be lost. I went to your address, and they told me you were here.’

‘Well, well,’ exclaimed the Colonel anxiously, ‘what is it you have to tell me ? Quick !’

‘We have found Frank Marden !’

‘Found him ! he is here in London now ?’

‘Yes ; but if you wish to see him you must come at once.’

‘I do wish to see him ! I must see him !’ said the Colonel ; ‘wait one moment.’

He went back into the vestry, and at once communicated the news to Hugh, and told Miss Hearne that she had better accompany them if she wished to be convinced of her mistake. After a moment's consultation it was agreed that Madge should return to her home with a friend, and there wait the result of the new turn which the affair had taken.

On the way the solicitor explained to the Colonel what had happened. That morning a person had called upon him with a cutting from a newspaper. It was the advertisement asking anyone who knew of the whereabouts of Frank Marden to communicate with his firm.

‘I’m the proprietor of a common lodging-house in the Borough, sir,’ said the man ; ‘this morning a man who came in late last night was found to be so seriously ill that he couldn’t get up or be moved. He seemed to be a gentlemanly sort of fellow. As is usual in such cases, I took possession of his things, and searching his pockets to see what he had about him, I found a pocket-book, and in it this address, which he had evidently cut out and kept. Thinking it might, perhaps, lead to something, I brought it on to you. I asked him if his name was Marden, and he seemed startled and

frightened, and that made me more and more sure he was, so I came on at once.'

A quarter of an hour later Hugh Folkard, his father, and Miss Hearne stood by the bedside of a dying man, whose resemblance to Hugh was remarkable. Violet looked at him for a moment, then her face went deadly pale.

'My God, what have I done !' she cried ; ' this is Frank Marden.'

The dying man opened his eyes for a moment, and looked at the woman who had cried his name aloud.

He knew her ; the other people about his bed were strangers to him.

'So you've found me out, Vi,' he whispered. 'Well, it does not matter now. Was it you who advertised for me ?'

'No.'

'Ah, I thought it was ! I found out after Lil was dead that she'd got a letter to you through one of the nurses, and I was afraid——'

'That she'd told me the truth ?'

'Yes. I went away ; I changed my name—hid myself from everyone. O, God ! what a life of terror it was ! Every moment I expected to be taken, but I hadn't the pluck to kill myself. I

tried to drink the fear away as long as my money lasted ; but that wasn't long when I came to this sort of thing, and last night I spent my last shilling in a drink that——'

The dying man was stopped. The doctor who had been called in returned to see how the patient was progressing. The Colonel took him on one side.

'Doctor,' he said, 'what is the matter with this man?'

The 'doctor,' a young assistant to a local practitioner, hesitated.

'Well,' he said, 'I haven't quite made up my mind. The symptoms may arise from alcoholic poisoning ; or—well, I shall be able to tell better later on.'

Two hours later Frank Marden was dead, and the young doctor, not having made up his mind, left the decision to a coroner's jury, who found, from evidence which was forthcoming, that the deceased died from the effects of poison administered by his own hand.

The Colonel did not attend the inquest. Proof of identity was given by Violet Hearne, who, from the moment she discovered the mistake she had made, was anxious to spare the Colonel and his son



whatever pain she could. The Colonel, for the sake of Hugh and his affianced wife, agreed that it was better his own secret should never be known. It was a terrible blow to him—the fate of his elder son—but he had a duty to do to the living, and that duty now was silence.

Six months later Hugh and Madge were quietly married in the country, and all their friends knew was that their marriage had been interrupted by a woman who had mistaken Hugh for another man, and had since acknowledged her mistake.

The subject was never referred to again by Hugh or his father. It was a painful memory to them both. They know that their terrible family secret will be kept by Violet Hearne, and that she will do all in her power to atone for the wrong she unwittingly did them.

## II.

### *THE LOST EXPLORER.*

It was a warm, dark night, and nearly all the seats in Hyde Park were occupied. The occupants were mostly lovers, indulging in that calm *al fresco* spooning which is characteristic of a certain class.

If you study the open-air sweethearts of the Metropolis, you will find they have all very much the same idea of courtship. Go through any of the parks that are open after nightfall, along the Embankment, anywhere where the authorities have placed convenient seats, and you will find young couples everywhere gracefully reclining in each other's arms.

As a rule, the young man sits well back with his arm round his beloved one's waist, and the young woman's head reclines peacefully on his shoulder. The young man at the same time clasps his fair partner's left hand. They rarely say a word to

each other. They just sit on in silent beatitude and let the world go by. If the world stops and stares they take not the slightest heed. They are oblivious of everyone but themselves. But the world does not stare. For some reason those lovers of the Park are sacred objects even in the eyes of the rude little boy and the coarse hobble-de-hoy. Even the policeman has a fellow-feeling for them in the corner of his heart, and never dreams of flashing his lantern upon them.

It is quite unusual to hear a sound from these lovers. If they ever talk at all, the conversation takes place before they sit down. From the moment they have assumed the regulation attitude towards each other, 'the beating of their own hearts' is all the sound they hear.

But to-night, on a seat under a tree in the quietest part of the Park, a man and woman are seated side by side who are conspicuous by the unconventionality of their behaviour. They are sitting bolt upright. They are not clasping each other's hands, and they are actually conversing. It must be granted that they are of a very different stamp to the general company. He is a clean-shaven, well-built man of about five-and-thirty, and she is a lady-like looking woman of about

eight-and-twenty. She wears a thick veil, and he is dressed in black, and, although the night is warm, he has on an overcoat, the collar of which is turned up.

Why he has his collar up one guesses as the moon comes from behind a cloud and reveals a glimpse of a clerical white tie.

The moment you have seen that you feel sure that on this particular seat there is no sweethearting going on. A clergyman would not ask the young lady to whom he was engaged to meet him in Hyde Park at ten o'clock at night; at least, if he did so his conduct would be thought rather extraordinary by his parishioners, and his bishop might have something to say on the subject.

As a matter of fact, the lady in the thick veil is the clergyman's wife—that is to say, he married her six months ago, and he thought he was making her his wife because she was a young widow; but on the wedding-day, just as they started for their honeymoon, a startling piece of information was communicated to them, and now the Rev. Septimus B. Bates doesn't know if he is a married man or not, and his wife is under the painful impression that it is quite possible that she has committed bigamy.

When Miss Margetson, the romantic daughter of Captain Margetson, of the Australian liner *Jupiter*, fell in love with a handsome young American who had apartments in her aunt's house at Rotherhithe—the genteel part of Rotherhithe—she was only just twenty. The Captain was away, Aunt Lavinia was not particularly nice to her and hadn't an atom of romance in her entire composition, and the company of Mr. Hubert Burrows was exceedingly agreeable. Though only six-and twenty, Mr. Burrows had knocked about the world a good deal, and had seen strange sights and cities. He had been with 'expeditions' to out-of-the-way places, he was a skilled botanist, a good sportsman, and a born adventurer. He was a great admirer of Speke, and Grant, and Baker, and Burton, and he had a sneaking fondness for the North Pole.

For the present, time was hanging idly on his hands. He had come to London with letters of introduction to a well-known explorer, and the explorer had started for some unknown spot a week before Mr. Burrows arrived.

He took lodgings in Rotherhithe at Aunt Lavinia's quite by accident. He had been to call on an old ship's captain he had known in a foreign part, and had seen the neat bill in Aunt

Lavinia's front parlour window. And he had also seen Maud Margetson's face peeping over the top of the front parlour blind. It was a short blind—one of those old-fashioned wire abominations which have disappeared from general use, but which still flourish in the shipping neighbourhoods. You can see plenty of them in the side streets of Southampton, and Portsmouth, and Plymouth, and many of the genteel houses of Rotherhithe still retain them.

The young American made himself very agreeable to the romantic young girl who beat her wings against her Rotherhithe cage and flattened her nose against the Rotherhithe window, and presently she took her little walks abroad with great regularity, and always managed to meet Mr. Burrows very soon after she banged her aunt's front-door to behind her.

Othello never told Desdemona more entertaining stories of adventure by flood and field than Hubert Burrows told Maud Margetson, and she believed them all.

Some of them were true, but Hubert Burrows was a born son of the land of the startling headline, and he had a fair amount of imagination.

Hubert was not a rich man, but he was young,

ardent, and had great schemes for the future. He was going to take Stanley's number down, and read papers to the Royal Geographical Society which would startle the world and be cabled to its four quarters regardless of expense. He had also a few hundred pounds ready money and no relatives—both excellent qualities in a young man who wants to make his way in the world unimpeded.

Having for the moment nothing particular to discover, he suddenly discovered that he was in love—very much in love—with Miss Margetson; and she was quite pretty enough to turn the head of any young man with spare time on his hands and no other female acquaintances.

Maud was enthusiastic over her gallant admirer. He was her first lover, and a girl's first lover generally has a greater grip of her feelings than any lover who may come after. She doesn't mentally survey him and weigh him up, and look out for his weak points as she does with her later admirers. She believes all the first lover says—no girl ever does that with the second; the first has generally taught her a lesson.

They made up their minds, as they were in love and papa wouldn't be home for a long time—he

had only just left the Docks when Burrows arrived—that they would be married. It was no good asking Aunt Lavinia's consent, because she never consented to anything. She was one of those sour women who would have put obstacles in the way of an infant who wanted its feeding-bottle. So Hubert arranged it all. He procured the license and two witnesses, and the marriage was to take place at a registry office, and they would go and live in apartments together, as far away from Aunt Lavinia as possible.

Hubert took the apartments, and Maud went with him to look at them. They were in Marquess Road, Canonbury, quite an aristocratic quarter after Rotherhithe, and the furniture was very much more modern than Aunt Lavinia's, which was heavy and solid, and had been in the family for years, having been made in days when furniture was intended for use, and not for show, and when a few wineglasses turned upside down on a side-board, a glass stand of wax flowers on the little table in the front-window, and three vases on the mantelpiece, constituted the entire art of interior decoration.

After the black horsehair chairs of the Rotherhithe parlour, Maud thought that the chintz-



covered furniture of the Canonbury first-floor was a dream of aristocratic elegance.

And there was a real oil-painting in the room, a landscape with sheep and cows and trees in the distance, and that was a great relief to the eye after living for years, as Maud had done, with two engravings in faded gilt frames—one of them the Day of Judgment, and the other Lord Nelson sitting for his photograph on the deck of the *Victory*, with a bullet in his back, dedicated by permission to Somebody, Esquire.

They went back to Rotherhithe, and Maud hated it, and wondered how she could possibly have lived so long behind those hideous wire blinds.

Then Maud set to and quietly packed her boxes, and went out with Hubert and bought a new dress and sundry things she wanted, and one fine day, when all was ready, they stepped out of the house and went to the registry office, and were married with two paupers for witnesses, who had half a crown each, and then they came back and walked into the little parlour arm-in-arm, and Maud said quite demurely, ‘Please, Aunt Lavinia, we’re married, and we are going to our new home.’

Aunt Lavinia fell back into the easychair, and lifted up her hands and exclaimed, ‘What!’ and so

Maud repeated the information, and Hubert, before the horrified aunt had recovered from her astonishment, had a cab at the door, and all the luggage on it—his and Maud's—and then he came in and held out his hand to Aunt Lavinia to say good-bye, but she wouldn't take it. All she said to Maud was, 'Wait till your father comes home, miss!' Hubert laughed at that, and said, 'Oh, I dare say we shall get on very well, but no one has any authority over Mrs. Burrows now. Good-afternoon.'

And that is how they left Aunt Lavinia and Rotherhithe.

And two months afterwards they were separated. Maud was to have been the heroic wife of an explorer—she was to have accompanied Hubert in his search after new lands, and her portrait was to have been in the illustrated papers, and she was to have been the first white woman in the impenetrable jungles of Central Africa, and the world was to have rung with her name; but when at last Hubert had the opportunity of joining an expedition which was starting for the Dark Continent, Maud was not quite broken-hearted that the company of ladies was not included in the programme. She was very fond of Hubert, but he was not quite so tender as he used to be, and his

mind wandered so far away, and he wanted to be fighting savages and doing dreadfully unromantic things; and so, when the chance came of going away, she knew that he never would settle down to life in a Canonbury first-floor, and after a few tears she let him go alone.

He was rather glad to go, although he felt the parting a little, but he, too, had discovered that he had settled down too early.

She went to the steamer and saw him off, and then she went back with the few hundred pounds which he had left her in the bank, and as soon as her father the Captain came home, she went back to Rotherhithe and asked him to forgive her, and as the house was really his as much as Aunt Lavinia's, he told her to make her home there till her husband came back from the expedition.

And when he sailed for Australia again with his vessel, he left strict instructions with his sister that Maud was to be treated with every consideration. Aunt Lavinia shrugged her shoulders, and from that time between aunt and niece there was an armed peace. But Maud, as a married woman, was her own mistress, and never allowed her aunt to forget it.

News of the expedition came to England from

time to time, and then all at once it ceased. The little band of explorers had passed beyond the bounds of civilization. After a year a rumour came that they had all been massacred; but this was speedily contradicted—a native brought news of them to the coast, and a letter from the leader.

Three years after Hubert Burrows had started, the news of his death reached England. He had been cut off from his comrades during a sudden attack by the natives, and though they had eventually been repulsed, Hubert Burrows had been taken away by them a prisoner, and a native later on reported to the chief of the band that the young American had been put to death.

Maud was a widow.

She mourned decently for her lost husband for two years, and then there came to lodge in the house a young curate who was doing temporary duty in the neighbourhood. The Rev. Septimus B. Bates was a gentle, simple-minded young man who craved for sympathy. He found it in the young widow. She took the greatest interest in his parish duties, and she personally attended to his comforts in the house. At the end of six months he proposed to her. The Captain was at home. He thought that an alliance with the Church was

not an undesirable one, and there was no fear of the Rev. Septimus wanting to explore any unknown and inhospitable shores—and so it was all settled.

It was quite a respectable wedding this time, and naturally in a church. Aunt Lavinia thawed considerably—to be the aunt of a clergyman was decidedly an improvement in her social rank, and she would be looked up to in the neighbourhood. ‘My nephew, the curate of All Saints,’ came readily to her lips, and she smiled pleasantly for the first time for twenty years as she sat in the place of honour on the wedding-day.

The Rev. Septimus, who had a little private income left him by his father, had other ideas than Rotherhithe, and he had procured an appointment at the West End. It was only a hundred a year, but the congregation was a good one, and the neighbourhood fairly fashionable.

The home had been furnished, and the newly-married couple were to return to it after the honeymoon. They were going to Hastings. They had taken their places in the train, when the newspaper-boy came along with the early edition of the evening papers. The Rev. Septimus purchased *Punch*, *Fun*, and *Judy* for his wife, and an evening

paper for himself, and began to read it more from force of habit than from any disrespect to Mrs. Bates.

They had come early, and there was quite ten minutes before the train started.

Suddenly the Rev. Septimus dropped the paper and looked at Maud with a white face.

‘Your first husband was an explorer, was he not, Maud?’ he gasped.

Maud looked up astonished. It was so odd for her second husband to begin talking about her first on her wedding-day

‘Yes, dear; why do you ask?’

‘W—was his name Hubert Burrows?’

‘Yes,’ stammered Maud, beginning to feel a vague alarm.

‘Oh, dear—I—it’s very dreadful—it is most awkward—really I——’

‘What’s awkward, dear? I—I don’t understand you.’

‘Oh, nothing—only he isn’t dead!’

The station, the platform, the passengers, everything reeled round the bewildered woman as she tried to collect her senses.

At last she managed to stammer out:

‘Not dead!’

‘No, my dear, if I ought to call you so. I think we’ll get out. It won’t do for us to go away anywhere till—till—this—er—alarming rumour is set at rest.’

He picked up the paper, got out of the carriage and helped Maud out, got their luggage from the van, then stood on the platform and mopped his brow.

‘I don’t know what to do. I think I ought to see my bishop at once. Oh, dear, take my arm—I suppose you may do that—and let’s get out into the street, where people won’t stare at us, and we’ll think.’

He left the luggage in the cloak-room—and he had a vague idea that that was where he ought to leave Maud—and then they went outside Victoria Station and turned up a quiet street.

‘It’s in the paper here,’ he said ; ‘read it.’

Maud took the paper with trembling hands, and read a statement to the effect that news had been received at Zanzibar that a young American explorer, a Mr. Hubert Burrows, who it was supposed had been killed some years ago by the natives, was still alive, and, though a prisoner, had saved his life by curing the chief of the tribe of a violent cold by the application of herbal remedies.

The tribe had instantly come to the conclusion that he was a great medicine man and a magician, and had kept him alive, but a prisoner, in order to benefit by his magic healing powers, and he was reported to have been seen recently by a traveller, and to have declared himself quite satisfied with his position, and to have expressed no desire to return to civilization.

Maud read to the end, and then looked up at Septimus.

‘If this is true——’ she said.

‘Well, then, of course, my dear—I—I am not your husband—and you—er—you have committed bigamy I—of course—I—that is, we—we couldn’t live together till this—er—mystery is cleared up.’

‘But it mayn’t be true.’

‘But it may—and—we mustn’t risk it. It’s the most dreadful thing. I—er—never was in such an awkward predicament in my life.’

‘What’s to be done?’ sobbed Maud, trying to realize her ghastly position. ‘I’m married to a man who’s going to live among savages all his life, if this is true.’

‘Of course it’s very painful,’ stammered the unhappy bridegroom; ‘but until we know more I—er—think you’d better go back to your aunt’s.’



‘Can I have a divorce?’

‘No, I’m afraid not. I don’t think it comes within the meaning of the Act. I mean it’s only desertion and cruelty, and that sort of thing—you can only have a separation.’

‘I’ve got that.’

‘Of course, of course, very thoughtless of me, but you know what I mean. At any rate, you can’t be his wife and mine too, and with this statement staring me in the face, I couldn’t risk it; and, of course, you couldn’t risk our living together as man and wife. He might come back.’

‘But he says he won’t.’

‘That doesn’t matter. I believe you can petition the Court for—er—restitution, and the Court can order him to return.’

‘How’s the Court to get at him in Central Africa among the savages?’

‘I don’t know—send out a commission, I suppose. Oh, Maud—I mean Mrs. Burrows—I really think I had better see the bishop at once—you see, I have gone through the ceremony with you.’

‘Yes, and it’s so stupid. We *are* married, and because some black man comes with a story to Zanzibar, you say I’ve committed bigamy. As my

husband, perhaps you ought to go out and see if Hubert is with those people.'

'Good gracious me! Venture out alone into a land of savages? Why, Stanley had a small army with him, and it took him a year to get there.'

'It's terrible.'

'It's horrible!'

'Where can I go?'

'I don't know, really. I think I ought to take you back to Rotherhithe.'

'What would people think? Everybody knows we are married, and nobody knows about my marriage to Hubert Burrows. It would look absurd for me to go home again and put my head out of a window and tell everybody that I think I've committed bigamy, but I'm not quite sure.'

'Yes, and—er—I should be involved in the scandal, and I was so well known there, being the curate. I—think you had better go and live in our new house alone—and I'll go away somewhere abroad. I'll change with a chaplain at some foreign place who wants to come home for a time.'

The unhappy couple walked about for an hour, and eventually it was agreed that Maud should go to the Rev. Septimus's house as Mrs. Bates, but

that he should be called away that very afternoon to some relative who was dying abroad.

And that was how they arranged it. Maud went to the new home and found it damp and uncomfortable, and the chimneys smoking, and cried herself to sleep in a draughty bedroom, and the Rev. Septimus Bates spent his wedding-night on a very choppy sea between Newhaven and Dieppe.

Six months have elapsed since then, and no further news has come of the husband who is a medicine man and a prisoner among the natives of Central Africa. The Rev. Septimus has failed utterly to find out any means by which the truth can be ascertained. Nothing can be proved. No one saw Hubert Burrows die, but nothing having been heard of him, under such circumstances his death would have been accepted, and his insurance paid had he been insured. But there was a report that he was still alive. He had been seen—a circumstantial story had been told and telegraphed to Europe.

How was the truth to be known, and when? He and Maud might go on living apart for twenty years, and still there would be a doubt as to whether Hubert Burrows was alive or not. There

was legal presumption of death till the meddling native turned up.

Maud Bates, or Burrows, was terribly lonely in the house she was to have entered a happy wife. She didn't care to make friends—there would be awkward explanations. The Rev. Septimus had quietly put himself right with the vicar of the parish he was to have gone to, and had obtained a temporary post abroad, but Maud felt that in her equivocal position she could never visit or receive visitors without making people talk about her husband's prolonged absence.

To-night she had come to Hyde Park in answer to a telegram received from Septimus, in which he announced he was coming to England for a few days. They met at the Marble Arch, and they wandered to a dark part of the Park and sat down where they could converse unobserved.

The situation would be laughable if it were not so exceedingly disagreeable to both of them.

The Rev. Septimus doesn't even know whether he ought to call his wife or Burrows' wife 'my dear' or not, and as to kissing her, that would be out of the question.

They had discussed the situation again and again, and he thinks now that the proper thing

would be for him to apply to have the marriage annulled on the ground that the first husband was alive, and leave it to the Court to decide how far the story affected the legality of the marriage. That would settle the question as far as the law was concerned.

The Rev. Septimus took off his hat to let the night breeze cool his brow. The more he thought the matter out, the more his head began to go round.

They separated at the Marble Arch about eleven o'clock. Maud went back home, and the Rev. Septimus went to a hotel. The next morning he went to his lawyers and laid the whole case before them.

The lawyers said he ought to apply to have the marriage set aside. It would be a most sensational case, and would raise an interesting point of law.

And at last the unfortunate clergyman, who didn't know if his wife was his wife or somebody else's, decided that that was the only course open to him, and he gave his lawyers instructions to commence the necessary proceedings.

Two days afterwards, and before anything had been done beyond preparing the necessary documents to put in evidence, Captain Margetson

returned from Australia, and the day after his arrival at Rotherhithe came over to see his daughter.

He knew the whole story, as his daughter had wept it all out on his fatherly bosom the day after the wedding.

He brought a gentleman with him—a thin, bronzed man of about five-and-thirty, who looked as though he had just recovered from a fever.

‘Mr. Johnson,’ said the Captain, as soon as they had been shown into the sitting-room, ‘this is my daughter who was Mrs. Hubert Burrows.’

The pale, sickly-looking man bowed.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘it was quite by accident that I found out that Hubert Burrows was the son-in-law of the Captain here. I came over in your father’s ship from Sydney. I was talking about Central Africa and my having been with the famous expedition, and then he told me about you. I understand you are troubled in your mind about your husband’s fate. You’ve married again, and you’ve heard since that your first husband is alive out there.’

‘Yes,’ said Maud, ‘that is quite true, unfortunately.’

‘Well, I think I can tell you something about it.

I saw him captured, and our fellows made a desperate effort to save him, but the blacks were too many for us. We had to beat a retreat. I was the doctor to that expedition, and now I'll tell you something that will ease your mind. Burrows, your husband, was sick at the time, and I'd discovered what was the matter with him, but I didn't tell him. I'd made an examination of him, and I will stake my professional reputation that the story brought to the coast by the traveller is a lie, if he ever brought it. But he didn't. That story comes from America. It's a pure fiction to fill up an odd corner with a bit of sensational news. It's just done to start a discussion again about the fate of lost explorers, just as they used periodically to revive the question years ago as to whether the Franklin expedition was alive at the North Pole or not.

‘The tribe that took your husband would have slaughtered him if he had been able to raise the dead to life, because in the struggle he fired at their chief and killed him, and if they didn't slaughter him there and then he wasn't alive when you married again.’

‘How can you be sure of that?’ exclaimed Maud anxiously.

‘I’ll tell you. When I examined him he had the seeds of a fatal malady—more than the seeds : it had got hold of him. If he lived three months after he was captured, then he performed a feat which has hitherto been unknown to medical science.’

‘Then, you are sure he died long ago.’

‘Absolutely. I’d hand a certificate to any coroner’s jury in the world.’

Captain Margetson had kept silence during the doctor’s narrative.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘that’s straight enough, isn’t it ? It was a lucky chance I met the doctor on board my ship. Where’s your husband?’

‘Septimus ? He—he’s at the Charing Cross Hotel, I believe.’

‘Oh, he’s not abroad, then ?’

‘No, he’s in town ; he’s come to see his lawyers—he was going to have the case brought before the law courts to decide.’

‘Well, we’ll decide it without them. Come along, doctor, we’ll go and see my reverend son-in-law.’

The Captain and the doctor found the Rev. Septimus at the hotel, and they told him the story to which his wife had just listened.



When it was told, Septimus gave a great sigh of relief. He had dreaded being handed down to posterity and printed in all the law books as an interesting case.

There was no doubt now that Maud was his wife. The doctor's story was conclusive.

An hour afterwards the Rev. Septimus B. Bates drove up to his own house in a hansom cab and entered it for the first time since his marriage.

'Maud, my darling, I think I may kiss you now,' he said, as he folded her in his arms.

'We *are* married now, then, you think,' she said, looking up at him smilingly; 'and you don't think I've committed bigamy?'

'No, no, that's all settled for ever. And now about the future—I suppose I can send for my things to the hotel?'

'Oh dear, I never thought of that. Won't it seem odd, my suddenly having a husband that nobody has ever seen?'

'Yes, but——'

'And besides, we haven't had a honeymoon yet!'

'Good gracious, no, of course not!—perhaps we'd better have it. Where shall we go?'

'Hastings.'

'Ah, yes—where we were going. Right. Pack

your things as quickly as you can, and come on to me at Charing Cross. We'll go from there by the first train we can catch.'

And they did, and just before the train started a newspaper boy came along with the papers.

The Rev Septimus bought his wife *Punch*, *Fun* and *Judy*.

But when the boy said, 'Evening paper, sir?' he promptly replied, 'No, thank you.'

His former experience of buying an evening paper before he started on his honeymoon did not encourage him to repeat the experiment.

### III.

#### *BLIND.*

‘BLIND! Blind! Blind!’

Jim Urquhart moaned out the words as he sat alone on one of the benches in the Hospital Gardens, and then, covering his sightless eyes with his hands, let his head drop down almost upon his knees.

He was a fine stalwart fellow was Jim Urquhart, broad-shouldered and muscular, and in the old days few men would have cared to quarrel with him.

It was a painful picture to contemplate this splendid specimen of handsome, vigorous manhood, crushed by the sense of his own helplessness.

One of the nurses noticed his dejected attitude, and came up to him and spoke kindly to him.

‘Come, come,’ she said, ‘you mustn’t give way

like that. You are well now, you know, and to-morrow you will be able to go home.'

'Home—yes, I shall go home,' cried the blind man, raising his head. 'I shall go home to my wife—to be a burthen to her, to be kept by her all my life. Ay! I know the truth—they've told me that I shall never see again. I'll go to my grave as blind as I am to-day. Pray God it may be soon!'

'Hush, hush!' said the nurse gently; 'many of us have terrible misfortunes to bear, but we must be patient.'

'Patient! ah, you don't know what you're talking about! You don't know what I've got to suffer, you don't know how I came to be here, and what it was cost me my sight.'

'Yes, I know that—I know that you were examining a revolver, and that an accident happened, and that, though the doctors saved your life, your eyesight had been destroyed.'

'Yes; but you don't know why I got that revolver out.' The blind man leant towards the nurse, and, taking hold of her dress, pulled her nearer to him. 'I'll tell you,' he said, speaking quickly and excitedly—'I'll tell you, and you can do what you like. I was jealous of my wife and

another man, and I swore an oath, if ever I had cause to believe that my suspicions were right, I'd kill them both. The night that the accident happened to me there was murder in my heart! Yes, murder, for, as there's a God in heaven, I meant to have their lives.'

The nurse was a woman of about thirty—a woman with a pale, gentle face—and a look of pain passed across it as she listened to Jim Urquhart's wild story.

'Don't tell anyone else that,' she said, 'and I'll forget I've heard it. Jealousy is a terrible thing—it is a madness, and that night you were mad and not accountable for your actions. Most likely you wronged your wife by your suspicions; try and think so. She seems very fond of you; she has been here every day to inquire after you.'

'And I wouldn't have her come near me.'

'You didn't wish it, and so the doctors didn't allow it; but I understand she is coming to-morrow to take you home. Try and believe that you wronged her, and forget the past. She is your best friend now, you know.'

'Yes, I suppose so. I must ask her to forgive me. That's it, nurse; and I must sit at home helpless and blind, and let her lead me where she

will and tell me what she chooses. My God ! think of it ! Me, Jim Urquhart, mad jealous of another man, and blind and helpless, and dependent on the charity of the woman I meant to kill !’

‘ I mustn’t listen to you any more,’ said the nurse. ‘ You’ll be calmer presently, and you’ll see things differently. From the little I’ve seen of your wife, when she came here, I believe she loves you devotedly, and that you have grievously wronged her. Now sit still and enjoy the fresh air and the sunshine ; and to-morrow when you go home make up your mind to be brave and patient, and to put all these evil thoughts from you, or you will make two lives miserable—your own and hers.’

Jim Urquhart made no reply, and the nurse moved quietly away.

‘ Poor fellow !’ she said to herself ; ‘ it’s terribly sad. Blind and jealous ! If he doesn’t get that terrible suspicion out of his mind, it would be much better if he had never recovered from his injuries. We have only nursed him back to something worse than death.’

A week later Jim Urquhart sat alone in his own place. He had taken his wife’s hand on the day he was discharged from the hospital, and she had led him quietly home. Not a word had passed

between them as to the events which had led up to the accident.

She had treated him with the utmost tenderness, and when they were at home, and he was seated in his old chair by the fireplace, she had put her hand quietly on his shoulder and said :

‘ Jim, you mustn’t fret about this. I love you better than anything in the world, and I’m young and strong, and you know that I can earn enough for us both, and I think we can be happy if you’ll only try and not worry too much about yourself.’

Then she had put her face down to his and kissed him, and Jim had taken the kiss passively, without returning it. There was still a secret in his heart that refused to let his better nature show itself.

But he had given no outward sign of the fever that was still consuming him ; not one reproachful word had passed his lips. It was only when he was alone that he let his pent-up agony have vent, and cried out that death would have been better than this blind helplessness.

Marion Urquhart was an actress at one of the minor theatres when handsome Jim Urquhart, a cousin of the proprietor’s, fell in love with her and married her. Jim was well known in the amateur

athletic world in those days. He was a fine boxer and a splendid wrestler, and had won quite a number of silver cups and prizes of all descriptions. He was artistic, too, and had taken to scene-painting, which was the reason of his association with his cousin's theatre. He was getting on well, and was leading assistant to a West End scene-painter at the time of his 'accident.'

There was nothing to prove that it was not an accident. He had explained the matter himself, as soon as he was able to speak. He was going to load the revolver, an old one he had had by him some time. It had a charge of blank cartridge in it, which he had forgotten all about. Examining the weapon, it went off, and he was terribly wounded about the face, and his eyesight was destroyed for ever.

There was nothing to disprove his story. He had never breathed a word of his jealousy to anyone. No living soul but himself knew the terrible design he harboured in his heart when he went up to his room that night, and took his old revolver from the place where it had lain neglected for years.

Of course now there was an end to his professional career, and there was nothing he could do at



all. His cousin, the proprietor of the minor theatre, had fallen on bad times, given up his lesseeship, and gone to America, and the other members of his family were too badly off to do anything for him at all. His wife would have to be the breadwinner now, and keep the home together—his wife, whom he had intended to murder! He had never told her, he had never even hinted that he suspected her of caring for anybody else. It was only in a moment of despair that he had confessed the truth to the hospital nurse, and he had told no one else. He was quite sure that his wife never suspected the truth. Their first conversation about the future convinced him of that.

She had left the little theatre some time previously, and had gone on tour with a company playing a London success round the provinces, and having made a decided hit in the leading part, she had secured a London engagement at the West End at a good salary.

The man of whom her husband was jealous was an actor at the same theatre. Arthur Blenheim was a gentleman, a society actor, one of the new school who have nothing in common with the old-fashioned ‘pros.’

It was a chance remark that first aroused Jim Urquhart's jealousy—a piece of that idle, mischievous gossip which is far too common in theatrical circles.

Marion Urquhart's professional name was Marion Darvell, and it was one night, while waiting in a restaurant opposite the theatre for his wife, that Jim heard the gossip.

To reach the restaurant one had to pass through a kind of bar. People using the bar could not see who was in the restaurant; in fact, chance customers would be quite ignorant that there was a room of any kind beyond.

While Jim Urquhart was sitting at a little table waiting for his wife, who used to come there and have supper with him, two young fellows came to the bar and began to talk, imagining themselves to be alone.

‘Nice girl, that little Darvell!’ said one. ‘By Jove! she played that love scene splendidly with Blenheim.’

‘Yes,’ replied the other, ‘but you can’t wonder at that; they say she’s dead gone on him, and he returns the compliment. They say he’s going to have a theatre himself next season, and I bet you she’ll be his leading lady. I was told——’

The conversation suddenly ceased. Mr. Urquhart knew instinctively what had happened. The proprietor was behind the bar, and he made signs to the young men that their conversation could be overheard.

Jim's face flushed, and he half rose from the table with the idea of rushing into the bar and seizing the traducer of his wife by the throat. But he thought better of it. It would mean a scene and a public scandal, and after all, if one were to take notice of all the malignant lying gossip that is indulged in concerning public people, one would have enough to do.

So Jim sat down and said nothing, and when his wife came in he received her with a smiling face, and never breathed a word to her of what he had heard.

But it rankled in his heart, nevertheless, and he brooded over it. He woke up in the night and thought about it. When his wife came home later than usual, or when she seemed a little *distract* or worried, the whole thing would come back to him and worry him. The fatal seed had been sown, and the evil weed of jealousy was growing apace.

At last he did a mean thing. He told his wife that he was going to a smoking concert given by an

athletic club, of which he had been a member, and that he should be home very late. Then he went and waited about in the court where the stage-door was situated, at the time the performers would be leaving.

He stood where he could not be seen, and he saw his wife come out with Arthur Blenheim, and they walked away up the street talking together.

There was nothing in that, but to a man already jealous this was 'confirmation strong as proof of holy writ.'

He went to the other end of the court, took a cab, and went home. A few minutes afterwards his wife arrived. She was astonished to see him, but he said he had a headache and had come away early. She told him Mr. Blenheim was thinking of taking a theatre, and had asked her to be his leading lady, but that nothing was decided yet.

All this was torture to Jim Urquhart, and in his jealous frame of mind he put the worst construction on it. Still he never breathed a word of his suspicion to his wife.

There is nothing too mean for a jealous man or woman to do. Jim Urquhart had his wife watched by a private inquiry agent. He was away at the painting room all day, and his wife was at home.

One evening the agent came to him with information. That afternoon Mr. Blenheim had called, and had remained with his wife for an hour.

That night when he got home his wife had gone to the theatre. He went upstairs, got out his revolver, and was loading it when the accident happened.

Marion could not fail, after her husband's return, to notice his coldness and dejection, but she ascribed everything to his blindness. She knew that he would feel his dependence upon her terribly, and in her gentle, womanly way she sought by every means in her power to make him feel it less. She had never been a demonstrative woman, but she lost no opportunity of telling her husband how much she loved him, how glad she was to be able to repay him for all his kindness in the past.

Jim Urquhart, with one fixed idea in his mind, became, if possible, more suspicious than ever. His wife was an actress—she was acting a part now. She was trying to make him believe that she loved him, so that he might have no suspicion that she loved someone else. Sitting alone in the darkness that was his for ever now, he would brood over his fancied wrong, until at last he would work himself up into a fit of frenzy. Jealousy carried

to excess is one form of madness, and Jim Urquhart's madness rapidly became intensified by perpetually dwelling on the one terrible idea which had made his life a hell.

And poor Marion, never dreaming what was passing in her husband's mind, concealed from him a great trouble which in the old days he would have shared with her.

It was quite true that Mr. Blenheim, who had an idea of taking a theatre of his own, had made her an excellent offer, but at the last moment the scheme had fallen through, and the friends who were going to find him the capital had, owing to family trouble, backed out, and so young Blenheim accepted another engagement at another theatre, and shortly afterwards resigned it, and temporarily abandoned the profession.

Marion Urquhart's trouble was not the loss of the position Blenheim had offered her as his leading lady. It was a far more serious one. For some time past she had not felt very well. She had gone to the theatre every night, and played as usual, but she began to feel great difficulty in getting through her parts. Once after the curtain had fallen on the second act she fainted, and was only just able to crawl through the remainder of the

play. She went to a doctor, who told her that it was nothing serious, but she must give up the exertion of acting at least for a month. If she did not the consequences might be serious. But she knew what that meant, and she went to the theatre again, but before the performance was half through she was almost inaudible.

The manager saw that she was ill, and that the play, which was just hovering between partial success and failure, was suffering in consequence. He was a kind-hearted man in his way, but business is business, and so after the performance was over he sent for Marion to his room, and told her it was better she should take a rest, as it was clearly impossible that she could go on as she was now, and he urged her to resign the part. Marian had no choice, and did so, and went home to her blind husband that night knowing that unless she soon got better it would be a hard struggle to keep things going at home. The Urquharts had not managed to save much money for a rainy day, and just after Jim's accident the little they had put by, which they had invested in a building society, was lost. The concern, which was genuine enough at first, had been connected with a gigantic fraud by the unprincipled men who had the management of

it, and was found to be hopelessly insolvent when the principal director suddenly disappeared. This misfortune Marion had kept from her husband, and now she was out of engagement, and there would be no money coming in until she was better.

She was afraid to tell Jim the truth. She saw how he fretted, as it was, at his helpless position, and she feared the shock of this new disaster.

But how was she to deceive him? If she remained at home in the evening he would know, and the doctor had told her that he must be kept as cheerful as possible, or he might gradually drop into a state of confirmed melancholia. He even hinted that in his present depressed state he might do something worse, and Marion knew what he meant, and shuddered. She knew that there was a fear of her husband taking his own life.

She sat opposite her blind husband the day after her dismissal from the theatre, a great fear at her heart, wondering what she could do, and at last she decided that every evening as usual she would go out as if going to the theatre, and go to the house of a lady who had been a great friend of hers, a lady to whom Mr. Blenheim had introduced her nearly a year ago and who took a great interest in her, and return home at the usual time.



She knew that she ought to have stayed at home and taken care of herself, but if she did Jim must know, and then she shuddered at the thought of what a knowledge of the truth would mean to him.

For a fortnight she kept up the tragic comedy, and then the last of her money was gone, and she had to pawn her trinkets and the little things she could spare one by one to keep the home together. And all this time she was growing weaker, and it was a terrible strain on her to go out at all.

She grew silent and depressed, and her husband noticed it, and put it down to another cause. She was getting tired of the burthen ; she was fretting under the chains that bound her to a blind, helpless man ; perhaps—then the old jealous madness came back with redoubled fury—she was deceiving him. She hated him because she was in love with another man. She was meeting Blenheim still. He was blind, and he knew nothing—nothing.

The horrible doubt which was gnawing at his heart preyed upon him to such an extent that he felt unless he did something he should go mad. At last he determined that he would know the worst. He sent for an old friend, and one night when Marion was away, as usual, he told his

friend to go to a certain address and leave a note. The friend wrote the note—‘Come and see me to-morrow evening.’ That was all it said.

The note was to the private inquiry agent Urquhart had employed before. The man came, received his instructions, and promised to call as soon as he had ascertained anything. Two nights afterwards he presented himself. He had done his work. Mrs. Urquhart had left the theatre—her name was not in the bill. He had followed her after she went out, and had seen her go to a house in South Crescent, Bedford Square—a house which was let out in apartments to theatrical people. He had also ascertained that Mr. Blenheim was not playing anywhere. Jim Urquhart’s suspicions were confirmed. His wife was meeting Blenheim at this house. It was all arranged between them.

As soon as he had heard what the private inquiry agent had to say he became calmer. He had but one idea now—revenge—but he would wait for it—wait till it could be certain and swift. He thanked the man, and, having no money about him, gave him his gold watch.

‘Pawn that,’ he said. ‘I can’t ask that woman for the money to pay you. It would be too horrible.’

When his wife came in that night and kissed her husband, she found that his brow was like ice. She was terrified, and fancied that he was ill.

‘It is nothing,’ he said — ‘nothing. I feel a little cold, that is all.’

Presently, while Marion was putting the scanty supper on the table, her husband said to her :

‘Well, how are you getting on at the theatre?’

She hesitated before she replied, then with an effort she said :

‘Oh, all right.’

‘Was it a good house to-night?’

‘Yes, dear, pretty good.’

‘Have they been good houses all the week?’

‘Oh yes, not bad.’

Poor Marion was in an agony of fear. She hated lying, and she feared betraying herself. Her husband so rarely spoke about the theatre or took any interest in it ; why should he begin to cross-examine her now ?

He asked no more questions, but he dropped his head and knit his brows.

‘She is lying to me,’ he said to himself ; ‘I knew that she was playing me false ; what else can it mean ? She has been out of the bill ; they are rehearsing a new play, perhaps, and someone else

is playing her part this week, and she's going every evening to meet that man. If I could only see her face one moment I could read the truth then. Ah, she thinks that I am blind and helpless, and that she can fool me as she chooses. She shall see—she shall see.'

And that night he lay awake by the side of his wife with murder in his heart. He could have taken her by the throat as she slept and throttled the life out of her, and then killed himself, but that was not his scheme. He wanted the man—the coward who had duped and wronged him, believing that he could not protect himself.

But he said no word, and all the next day he held his peace.

But during the day he managed, unknown to his wife, to send a message to the inquiry agent, and when the wife had gone out, ostensibly to the theatre, the man came, and he said to him, 'Now, take me to this house.'

The man hesitated.

'I'll take your arm. You can lead me there.'

'What are you going to do,' said the agent anxiously, 'in your condition? I—I dare not undertake the responsibility. Besides, after all, you may be wrong in your suspicions.'

‘She goes there—every evening.’

‘Yes—but it may be innocently.’

‘No; she has lied to me, and an innocent woman does not lie. She pretends that she is still going to the theatre every night.’

The man still hesitated, but at last, terrified by Jim Urquhart’s rage, he consented. He dared not refuse and leave him alone in the state he was in, and, after all, if he did go to the house, what could he do? One can always prevent a blind man doing any mischief, and so they went out together, and the detective led his client carefully through the streets until they came to South Crescent.

‘Lead me to the door,’ exclaimed Urquhart.

The man hesitated.

‘By heaven! if you don’t I’ll cry aloud her name here in the public street, and get a mob round me, and they shall help me.’

At that moment there was the sound of a door closing opposite to them. The detective started. Someone was coming out of the house. Instantly Urquhart with a blind man’s quickness knew what the detective’s start meant. Shaking him off, Urquhart staggered across the road in the direction of the sound.

At that moment a man’s voice cried out, ‘Mr.

Urquhart, good God! what are you doing here? You have heard—someone has told you?’

‘Yes, I have heard—I know!’ shrieked Urquhart, mad with a murderous rage. ‘You have robbed me of my wife—and you shall answer for it to me now, you pitiful villain!’ He had seized Blenheim—for it was he—by the shoulders, then, raising his hands with a swift movement, he gripped him by the throat.

Blenheim was a powerful man, but his strength was nothing to Urquhart’s. The detective and two or three men, attracted by the scene, rushed forward and endeavoured to force Urquhart to relax his grip; but he was mad, and held on with a madman’s strength, gradually choking the life out of his victim.

The men called aloud, the women who had come upon the scene screamed, but the two men were locked together in a deadly embrace. And then a woman who had heard the screams outside ran suddenly from the doorway and rushed forward, exclaiming: ‘Help! help! they are killing him! Arthur—Arthur!’

Jim Urquhart heard the voice, and loosed his hold and staggered back: it was not his wife’s voice, and the woman called Blenheim Arthur.

Instantly the crowd surrounded the injured man, who had fallen to the ground. The detective saw his chance, and seized the blind man by the wrist and drew him away up a side street, hailed a hansom, dragged him into it, and took him home.

He seemed in a stupor and never said a word. The detective remained by him, determined not to leave him till the wife came in. The man was mad, he felt, and not to be trusted by himself.

Twelve struck, and then one, and still no wife returned, and the detective began to feel alarmed.

What had happened? had the man been killed? A few minutes past one there came a knock at the door. The detective opened it, and it was Arthur Blenheim himself—pale, and his eyes seemed swollen, and he spoke with difficulty.

‘Is he in?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then let me see him. I must speak to him. You had better stay with us.’

Blenheim entered the room. The blind man had heard the conversation outside, and stood up as he entered.

‘Mr. Urquhart, there is not a moment to lose—you have wronged me, you have wronged your wife terribly; but it is too late to talk of that. If you

want to speak to her before she dies, you must come at once.'

'Dying!' cried the blind man. 'Marion dying!'

'Yes; she has been ill. She would not let you know she was earning no money—to deceive you she pretended to go to the theatre—she went to the house of a friend, to the house of an actress, a lady who is my affianced wife.'

'Your wife!'

'Yes. This evening she was taken suddenly worse—she broke a bloodvessel, and a doctor was sent for. The lady, knowing I knew something of you, sent for me in her trouble. I was living near, and I came round. I was coming to fetch you, when you—when—you know the rest. Come—for God's sake come; your wife cannot last many hours.'

They took him between them, and almost lifted the blind man into a cab. He was like a man in a dream. He reached the house in time to hear his wife's last words and to receive her forgiveness; to learn why she had deceived him, and how baseless from the first his suspicions of her had been. And then with her arms round his neck, her cold lips pressed against his cheek, she died.

From that hour the wretched husband became a



prey to despair. In his utter misery and his terrible remorse his mind gradually gave way, and to-day he is a hopeless, melancholy madman in the county asylum. There he will end his days, and if Providence is merciful the end will come swiftly.

And that was the tragedy that grew out of the idle, mischievous chatter of two irresponsible scandal-mongers, who chattered away a man's reason and a woman's life in the bar of a public-house.

## IV

### *'OPKINS.*

HE was always called 'Opkins by those about him, because he lived in the very centre of Cockneydom, and was an errand boy to a City firm employing a very large number of workmen, all more or less affected with an inability to sound the letter H in its proper place. They sounded it where they ought not to have sounded it, and left it unsounded where they ought to have sounded it, and, though he was from the country himself, he gradually fell into the custom of the land in which he lived.

I saw him first when he was riding a pony among the Malvern Hills. He didn't ride it for his own pleasure, but to exercise it for the family in whose service he was employed to black boots, pump water, attend to the garden, and look after the animal in question.

He was a nice-looking, intelligent lad, and even in those early days he brushed his hair neatly, and wore as clean a face as was possible under the circumstances, and always turned out with a clean collar and a black jacket and decent boots on Sunday.

He had a vivid taste in neckties, and little Hopkins's cravats were always easily distinguished a long way off. Sometimes they were scarlet, occasionally bright green, and once when a local draper was selling off a job lot he managed to secure for fourpence-halfpenny a bright orange abomination which made everybody who looked at him feel bilious and see spots.

He was a good boy in spite of his taste in ties and his desire to be a dandy upon five shillings a week, and worked hard and was kind to his mother, a faded, good-looking woman of about five-and-thirty, who came to Malvern when he could scarcely toddle, took a small cottage, and earned what she could by dressmaking.

Nobody knew anything of her or where she came from, and she never made any friends. She did what little work she got conscientiously, and she spoke in a quiet, educated manner, and her neighbours considered her a 'ladylike' woman.

Soon after she arrived she put up a card in her window—'Mrs. Hopkins, dressmaker'—and gradually she got a small connection among the people who came to market, the small farmers' daughters, the shop-girls and the servants; but she only just earned enough to make both ends meet, and she was very glad when her boy was able to go out and earn a few shillings a week.

She sent the boy to the village school, and she taught him herself in the evening when she could spare the time. The schoolmaster, who once received a letter from her excusing her boy's non-attendance on account of his illness, said the letter was that of a well-educated woman, and the report spreading, it became in time local gossip that Mrs. Hopkins had seen better days, and was a 'mystery.'

Whatever mystery there was about her, she took it to her grave, and it was after her death that the boy Arthur became ambitious of seeing the world and accepted an offer to go to London as office-boy to a gentleman who had taken some notice of him during a summer holiday at Malvern.

When the mother's funeral expenses and little local debts were paid, there were only a few pounds left, and these were handed to Arthur together

with an old writing-desk of his mother's, in which there was nothing except a few half-sheets of paper, a marriage certificate, and a certificate of his birth—the marriage certificate was that of Agnes Hilton and Arthur Hopkins. There was no certificate of his father's death, but as his mother had never mentioned his father to him, the boy considered that he was dead, or he would have seen something of him.

He didn't know, and he didn't particularly care.

He was going to London, the city of fashion, and there his choice of neckties would be unlimited, provided he had the cash.

'Opkins—for that was the name he was generally known by at the office—grew up into a tall, slim, good-looking lad, and was gradually advanced to the position of junior clerk.

It was a proud moment for him when, with a pen behind his ear, he sat on a desk in the office in a secondhand frock-coat of undeniable West End make, and felt that he had at last obtained a position in commercial society.

He had purchased at the same time that he bought the frock-coat a fashionable high hat, also secondhand, for the sum of eighteenpence, and this, after the expenditure of an extra sixpence for

blocking and ironing, looked so thoroughly West Endy that the first Sunday he wore it he had himself photographed in it on Hampstead Heath, although that involved the expenditure of still another sixpence.

Quite the gentleman was Mr. 'Opkins when he was eighteen, and 'Gentleman 'Opkins' was the name chaffingly bestowed upon him by his fellow-clerks who remembered him in his office-boy days.

Where he lived nobody knew. He inherited the gift of reticence as to his personal affairs from his mother. He was popularly supposed to starve himself somewhere in a small attic in order to devote the bulk of his eighteen shillings a week to dress.

He had once been met after office hours in an overcoat with an astrakhan collar, a pair of patent leather boots, and a cigar, looking with hungry eyes at the window of a ham-and-beef shop.

When he was four-and-twenty, and in receipt of a salary of five-and-twenty shillings per week, 'Opkins fell a victim to the tender passion.

It was not exactly love at first sight, but it was after a very short acquaintance. He met his charmer first on a steamer bound for Rosherville Gardens one Saturday afternoon in the summer.

He made himself agreeable to her, he danced with her in the gardens, and she allowed him to see her to her door in Bingham Street, Camden Town, after the close of the day's festivities. At the door he asked if he might have the honour of taking her to the Zoological Gardens the following day, Sunday. He had two tickets which the governor, a Fellow, had kindly presented him with. The young lady smiled, and said he might, and he arranged to be at the top of Bingham Street at half-past two.

At the appointed hour 'Opkins presented himself in his favourite frock-coat and high hat—'quite the swell'; and in order to give an increasing air of gentility to his appearance, he puffed half-heartedly at a cigar, which he had purchased for twopence at a shop on his way. He didn't care for smoking, but the careful manipulation of the cigar enabled him to make the most of the lavender kid glove which he wore upon his right hand. It had been cleaned several times with bread, but it looked well still, and when it was past cleaning he had the left hand in reserve. It is wonderful how long you can make a pair of gloves last if you only wear one at a time and carry the other carefully in your hand.

It was a delightful afternoon at the Zoo, and Miss Lizzie Beamish felt quite proud of her escort, and said that the Zoo was much better than she imagined on Sunday, and the company was so much more select, to which Mr. 'Opkins replied that he invariably spent his Sunday afternoons at the Zoo for that reason.

After the Zoo Miss Beamish returned home, having to go out with her mamma to a friend's house, but before they parted she confided her domestic circumstances to her swain. Her mamma was a widow, and let apartments, and she was the only daughter. She didn't assist her mamma in the housework, as they kept a servant, but she was employed behind the counter of a pastrycook's shop in High Street, Camden Town. They met again by appointment the following Sunday, and then they began to 'walk out,' which is the first step to being engaged, and after a few weeks Mr. 'Opkins was invited to tea, and introduced to the widow, and it was generally understood that he was Lizzie's young man.

He explained his prospects to Mrs. Beamish at considerable length. He was a favourite with his employers, he was giving satisfaction, and he was sure of a rise at the end of the year.



To which the widow replied that it was all very well, but at present he had only five-and-twenty shillings, and that wasn't a grand income to marry on. She would not consent to an engagement, but he might, if he chose, continue to pay his addresses to her daughter, and she would see. She believed in long engagements—they were both young, etc.

Every Sunday after that 'Opkins took tea at the house of his young lady, and during the week he wrote her elegant love-letters upon the firm's paper, and he was, if possible, more particular about his get-up than ever. He even became extravagant, for he made it a rule always to put on both his gloves before he knocked at the door in Bingham Street on Sunday afternoon, and he sat in the parlour with them on until tea appeared and it was absolutely necessary that he should take them off.

The widow used occasionally to leave them alone while she busied herself about the house on the Sundays that their only servant went out. At such times 'Opkins would grow romantic and tell Lizzie that he wished he was a nobleman for her sake; and he imparted to her the fact that he believed he had good blood in his veins, and that

was the reason that he always was so particular about his clothes.

'You look a gentleman always, Arthur,' said Lizzie.

'And I believe that I am one,' he replied. 'I am sure that my mother was a lady—everybody in Malvern said so.'

'What was your father?'

'Opkins remembered that his father appeared on his mother's marriage certificate under the head of profession or calling as 'soldier,' so he promptly replied, 'In the army,' and Lizzie said 'Oh!' and added that she always thought that Arthur had a military bearing, which was unfortunate, because from that day forward he stuck his chest out and carried his head erect in a manner which made a long walk with him much less enjoyable to her than it used to be.

That night, as he lay awake in his little top room in Islington, Arthur Hopkins began to think that he had neglected the mystery of his birth too long. His mother had been accepted as 'very ladylike.' What had his father been? A soldier, he knew, but what sort of a soldier? and was he dead or alive? He thought it out, and made up his mind that he would make inquiries or advertise, or do

something. He felt that he ought to know more about his father than he did.

He thought it over for a long time, and at last he determined to advertise, and he spent a whole four shillings in the following :

‘ HOPKINS.—Wanted, information of Arthur Hopkins, who in 186— was married at —— to Agnes Hilton, and was in the Army.—Information to A. H., 23, —— Street, Islington.’

Three days after the advertisement appeared, on his return home about eight in the evening, his landlady informed him that an old gentleman had called to see him, and would call again at ten o’clock.

‘ An old gentleman,’ thought ‘Opkins ; ‘ perhaps it’s my father turned up himself.’

At ten o’clock he was waiting outside the door looking up and down the little street. He had only a bedroom and it was very small, and he wasn’t quite sure who his visitor might be, and so he didn’t want to expose the nakedness of the land to him. In honour of the occasion he had put on his frock-coat, the high hat, and one glove. It is always as well to let the first impression be a favourable one. He also held between his teeth

the end of a cigar which he kept for the purpose, and chewed it nonchalantly between his teeth.

At ten o'clock a tall, fine-looking old man came slowly along the street. He was very shabbily dressed, but he had an aristocratic air about him. Was it his father—could his father have been so old as that? Why, this man was seventy if he was a day.

The old gentleman came nearer and stopped at the door.

'If you are looking for the gentleman who advertised, it is me,' said 'Opkins.

The old gentleman looked him carefully up and down.

'Oh, it's you, is it! Well, I had a son named Arthur Hopkins, and he was a soldier. But I didn't know he was ever married, and perhaps you can tell me if it's my son you are inquiring about?'

'My name is Arthur 'Opkins,' was the reply; 'my father was Arthur 'Opkins and a soldier.'

'Hem,' said the old gentleman, 'you're like him, now I come to look at you—his style, too; if you are my son's son, you are my grandson.'

Arthur didn't know quite what to say. If he had found a grandfather he was pleased, because it

is something to have a grandfather, and this was a fine old fellow.

‘I think there’s no doubt,’ said Arthur ; ‘but is my father alive?’

‘My son is dead ; he died in India while he was with his regiment.’

‘What was he—an officer?’

‘No, a common soldier.’

‘Oh!’ said Arthur. It was a slight blow.

‘But,’ said the old man, ‘let me know something about you and your mother.’

‘Didn’t your son ever tell you he was married?’

‘No. That’s not wonderful ; he never told me anything. He was my second son, and always wild. He left home before he was twenty, and I never heard any more of him except that he’d enlisted, and afterwards I got the papers from the War Office to say he was dead.’

‘Well, grandfather, for I suppose you are my grandfather, it’s very odd that we should meet after all these years. My mother died when I was a boy. She was a lady, I’m sure, and yet I can’t understand her marrying a common soldier.’

‘Well, he was a common soldier, but he was a gentleman.’

'Ah, I thought so,' said 'Opkins eagerly.

'Yes, and if he had outlived me he would have had the title.'

'The what!' shrieked Arthur, everything suddenly going round with him.

'The title. I am Sir Arthur Hopkins, and a Baronet, and as my eldest son is dead, it would have passed to Arthur—and now——'

'It will pass to me!' yelled 'Opkins, almost beside himself—'it will pass to me! I shall be Sir Arthur 'Opkins, Bart., and Lizzie will be Lady 'Opkins?'

The old man stared at him. He didn't quite understand the situation at first. But gradually it dawned upon him.

'Yes, of course,' he said slowly, 'if you are really my son's son, and you can prove it, the title will pass to you.'

'And the estates,' gasped Arthur—'the estates as well.'

The old man laughed.

'Estates,' he said—'estates! ha, ha, that's good! Why, there hasn't been a square foot of land in our family for over fifty years. Nor anything else. Do you know what I am?'

'A Baronet.'

‘Yes, but I’m timekeeper at a big building yard—that’s what I do for a living since my wife died.’

‘Her ladyship is dead, then?’

‘Oh yes, her ladyship died—died of trouble with the boys. She was a lady, too, and had a bit of money—not much, a few hundreds she had inherited from her father, an old sea captain. But the boys had it all out of her, and Arthur, your father, was her favourite, and had most. He broke her heart when he flung up a good situation in the City and enlisted.’

‘Dear me, dear me!’ exclaimed Arthur; ‘it’s very sad, but you are a Baronet.’

‘Yes, I’m Sir Arthur right enough, but I dropped the title long ago, when I went to look for work to keep me off the parish.’

‘How did we lose our money, Sir Arthur?’

‘Oh, my father lost it. My grandfather was made a Baronet nearly a hundred years ago after being Lord Mayor, and my father lost the whole of the fortune and the business, and went bankrupt. But the title goes on if the money stops. If I’d been a shoeblick or a crossing-sweeper I should still have been Sir Arthur Hopkins, Bart.’

‘I’m very sorry—very sorry. Will you—er—

will you take anything to drink? There's a private bar at the house at the corner.'

'No, I never drink; I've seen enough of what it did for my lads, both of 'em. But you'd better come and see me, and bring the certificate of birth and every paper you have of your mother's to my lodgings to-morrow evening. I live in Peabody Buildings, Clerkenwell Road. Here, I'll write the number down for you.'

He scribbled his address with a bit of lead pencil on a leaf of an old pocket-book, and handed it to Arthur.

'There you are,' he said; 'to-morrow evening about eight you'll find me in. Good-night.'

'Good-night, Sir Arthur,' replied 'Opkins, taking his grandfather's hand. 'I'm sure my father was your son. I hope you'll let me be an affectionate grandson to you, although we've seen nothing of each other since I was born.'

'Oh, we'll see about that. You're a decent-looking young chap enough, but we'll see.'

The old man nodded, turned on his heel, and went quietly back up the street.

And Arthur, his brain in a whirl, rushed off to Camden Town, gave a double rap at the door in Bingham Street, and when it was answered dashed



into the little parlour, where Lizzie and her mother were at supper, and sank into a chair.

‘ Good gracious, Arthur ! what’s the matter ?’ cried Lizzie ; ‘ are you ill ?’

‘ No, not exactly, only excited. It’s nothing, only it’s what I always thought. Lizzie, I told you I was a gentleman—I’m more, I’m a Bart. Lizzie, one day you’ll be Lady ‘Opkins !’

It took Arthur a long time to explain to the widow and her daughter, but gradually the truth dawned upon them, and they began to sit upright in their chairs, and toy with the bottle of pickled onions ; and they rang the bell for the poor little maid of all work to wait on them, and the widow remembered that years ago a gipsy had told her that she would be presented to the Queen, and Lizzie thought that she should have to give up several of her female acquaintances—they were not quite in her sphere. And Arthur was made much of, and the favourite cat, who had never before been interfered with in his whole life, was uncere- moniously bundled out of the easy-chair, and Arthur was forcibly seated in it by the united efforts of mother and daughter, and when he left shortly after midnight they both saw him to the door, and Lizzie kissed him on both cheeks, and involuntarily

called him 'Sir Arthur,' as she bade him good-night.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next night at eight o'clock precisely 'Opkins presented himself at Peabody Buildings, and was presently seated in the poorly furnished apartments of his grandfather, the Baronet.

He had brought all he had to prove his identity with him, and that was his mother's marriage certificate. But the old man needed very little evidence. He knew that his son was a soldier, and Arthur was like him, and had the Hopkins's bent little finger, which was the only thing that had remained in the family.

'Yes,' said the old man; 'there is no doubt you're my grandson. Your father and I never spoke or wrote to each other after he enlisted, so I quite understand why I never heard of the marriage. He was a young man who never talked to anybody very much about his private affairs, and it is quite probable that he never told your mother any of his family history. She married him as a soldier, and when he died she looked upon herself as a soldier's widow. She was a well-educated woman, you say?'

'Oh yes; the clergyman at Malvern said how ladylike she was, and—er—I have always been

considered very gentlemanly—at the office they call me Gentleman 'Opkins.'

'Ah, yes, your father was a gentleman in his ways, too, and looked one every inch. He would never have married an uneducated woman; but he probably used your mother badly. He used everybody badly.'

'Opkins remained for some time with his grandfather, who explained to him that he wasn't well off, but he wasn't in debt, and he didn't want to borrow any money; he didn't drink, and he didn't smoke, and that to the outside world he was only Arthur Hopkins, timekeeper, having dropped his title after the death of his wife and the loss of her small income.

'But you are Sir Arthur, grandfather,' said 'Opkins, 'and I may call you so?'

'If it gives you any pleasure you can, but when I die, and you are the new Baronet, I shouldn't use the title if I were you. It's in the way of an honest living, unless you take up coals, or wine, or beer, or something that the aristocracy do trade in, and aren't ashamed to sell and travel in. After all, we can't help having the title, but the best thing we can do to show our respect for it is not to drag it through the mud more than we can help.'

Arthur said he understood his grandfather's feelings, but he thought to himself that he wasn't going to be a Baronet for nothing when his time came, and that he would give his aristocratic instincts and appearance every possible chance.

There was a distinct change in the appearance of 'Opkins from that day. How he did it on his modest salary was a mystery, but he grew thinner and more distingué every day. The thinness was not the mystery—it was the distinguéness. He must have starved himself to keep up his appearance, but he was determined that as the heir to a Baronetcy he would comport himself as such.

With the clerks in the office he was affable without being familiar. He didn't tell them his family history because he felt that he would be chaffed and called 'Sir Arthur,' and the title was not one to be taken in vain.

But he thought a great deal, and went on Sundays to Hyde Park and on Saturday afternoons to Bond Street and Piccadilly, and he studied as far as he was able with his limited opportunities the manners and customs of the upper classes.

He stuck to his desk manfully, and studied in the evening and did everything in his power to improve

himself, and so, writing a good hand and being fairly good at figures and very zealous in his employers' interests, and having no bad habits, his salary was presently raised to thirty shillings a week.

It was at this time that, after a long conversation with Miss Beamish and her mamma, he determined that on that thirty shillings he would risk the perils of matrimony. Old Mrs. Beamish had changed her opinion with regard to long engagements. She and her daughter felt that a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush, and that if Arthur were allowed to change his mind or grow cool such an opportunity of marrying into a titled family would not occur again. Baronets don't come down Bingham Street, Camden Town, more than once in a blue moon.

Lizzie's mamma at the last moment revealed the fact that she would come down with a little money which she had saved, amounting to about £50. Lizzie herself confessed to Arthur that she had £20 in the Savings Bank, and that she would at least for a time continue in her situation, and so 'Opkins, like a good fellow, being passionately in love, determined to make his sweetheart the future Lady Hopkins at once.

It was a very quiet little wedding, and it took place during the week of Arthur's summer holiday. Lizzie obtained only two days' leave from her situation, but that is quite time enough to get married in. The guests were intimate friends of the family only. Sir Arthur honoured the ceremony with his presence, and came back to the mid-day meal, which in honour of the occasion was called a wedding-breakfast, and Lizzie's uncle, who was head-waiter at an eating-house in the Strand, gave her away. The only lady present was Miss Jones, an aged governess who lived in the street and had once given lessons in the nursery of a foreign Countess. She came in mittens, wept copiously and rambled pleasingly after the portwine kindly supplied by the head-waiter had circulated freely. She declared that Lizzie reminded her very much of the dear Countess, and Arthur bore himself exactly like one of the distinguished young noblemen she had been in the habit of conversing with during her early professional career.

Mr. and Mrs. 'Opkins went to Brighton for their brief holiday, and returned to live at Bingham Street, it being considered more economical and a better address than Islington, and then Arthur

went back to his desk and Lizzie returned to her place behind the counter of the confectioner's shop in High Street.

\* \* \* \* \*

A year later Sir Arthur Hopkins died, and then a mysterious paragraph found its way into print announcing the fact, and that he was succeeded by his grandson, Mr. Arthur Hopkins, a young gentleman engaged in commercial pursuits in the City.

'Opkins was a Baronet at last, and though his total income from all sources was at that time only £2 a week, he was supremely happy. Lady Hopkins had previously withdrawn herself from the confectioner's counter owing to a domestic circumstance which will happen to the best regulated married couple, and Sir Arthur refused to allow her to return. He could not consent to Lady Hopkins serving penny buns and jam tarts to the democracy of Camden Town.

He has assumed the title permanently, and has 'Sir Arthur Hopkins, Bart.,' on the cards which he has had printed.

At the office he is still called 'Opkins,' but by his quiet demeanour and steady behaviour he has won the complete respect of his employers and the esteem of his fellow-clerks.

His wife, who is a good little soul, has not been spoilt by her alliance with the 'aristocracy,' but bears her honours with becoming modesty. She is always called her ladyship by her mother and the general servant, and she endeavours to bear herself as far as possible with dignity under trying circumstances. A short time ago, on passing their house in Bingham Street, I saw the handle of the door tied up with a white kid glove, and I therefore was not at all astonished to read shortly afterwards among the births in the *Times* the following :

‘ On the 5th inst., at the residence of her mother, the wife of Sir Arthur Hopkins, Bart., of a son and heir.’



## V.

### *THE GRASS WIDOW.*

TOM ENIFER had had a very bad time, and he was feeling very depressed, and generally, to use his own expression, ‘down in the mouth,’ as he wandered aimlessly along Oxford Street towards Hyde Park. What on earth was he to do? He had a wife at home in the furnished rooms he occupied—a decent, brave little woman, to whom he was very much attached—and though he could starve a bit and rough it himself, if the worst came to the worst, the idea of her being homeless and hungry, or dependent upon the little he could raise by borrowing from his few friends and acquaintances, was horrible to him. He would gladly have taken a berth and done anything, but there was nothing to do, and no berths to be had, and he had been so long out of work that he didn’t even know if his old employers would give

him a character even if he could find a vacancy anywhere.

For three years Tom Enifer had been following the turf—that is to say, he had been attending race-meetings and backing horses. When he was a clerk in a City office he had a piece of good luck, which he was inclined to look upon now as one of the worst pieces of luck that had ever befallen him. He had been induced by a racing man, whose acquaintance he had made, to have £10 (the whole of his savings) on a horse for the Cesarewitch as soon as the weights appeared, and he had backed it at the remunerative odds of 100 to 1. The horse just managed to squeeze home by a short head, and Tom Enifer suddenly found himself possessed of £1,000.

A thousand pounds! and Tom's salary was only £200 a year! It was to him wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. He thought himself a small Rothschild, and, elated by his good fortune, he felt confident that he had only to go on backing horses, with this capital at his command, to make a big annual income.

So he gave up his berth in the City, and went racing with varying fortune. For a time he was fairly successful; then he had a series of bad

meetings, and plunged to recover his losses, and came near the end of his capital ; things mended just as they were at their worst, and a bet of £500 to £40 put him on his legs again for awhile.

But the end came at last, and now, with only a few shillings in his pocket, Tom Enifer had to recognise the fact that he could not hope to retrieve his position on the turf, and that the time had come when he must settle down again to work if he could get it. He was not only reduced to his last handful of silver, but he was in debt, and there was a fortnight's rent overdue. Looking back at the three years, during which large sums of money had passed through his hands, he couldn't help asking himself what benefit the money had ever been to him. He had bought nothing that was 'property' ; he had not even set up housekeeping, but had remained on in the two rooms that he had furnished when he first married on his modest salary. The money had had no real value except for gambling purposes.

And now that everything was gone, and he was almost penniless, he had nothing to show for his three years devoted to the turf, and he had, he feared, dropped so much out of the habit of steady

work that it would be a terrible hardship for him to take to it again.

But something must be done for the wife's sake, and he was wondering to himself what that something could be, as, with his pipe in his mouth, he sauntered up Oxford Street.

There were too many people in Oxford Street. They jostled him, and the noise of the traffic disturbed him. He wanted to be alone that he might think. He turned up a side street, and presently found himself in a quiet square. It was just dusk, and one by one the houses were being lighted up and the blinds drawn down. Tom Enifer put his back against the railings of the square, thrust his hands in his pockets, puffed away at his pipe, and gave himself up to a big big think. Presently at No. 7, just opposite to him, the door opened, and a servant girl came out. She had in her hand several letters, which she was evidently going to take to the pillar-box at the corner. She crossed the road, and as she did so Tom noticed that she dropped one of the letters. He called out, 'Hi, miss!' but the girl took no notice and went on. He thought it strange, so he went into the roadway and picked up the letter, thinking he would go after the girl and give it to her at the pillar-box.

She was evidently deaf, or she hadn't heard him shout.

Just as he picked the letter up and put it in the side pocket of his overcoat, a man came along the square, looked at him, and exclaimed, 'Hulloh, Enifer, who the dickens would have expected to see you here!' It was an old racing friend Tom hadn't seen for a long time. They began to converse together; the friend had a good thing, a stable secret, a moral for the big race the following week. Tom forgot all about the letter in his pocket, took his friend's arm, walked with him into Oxford Street, and, absorbed in the wonderful 'good thing' that was such a moral, forgot the letter completely, and never remembered it till that night when he got home. Then, while turning out his pockets, he found it.

And then for the first time he noticed that it had been insecurely fastened and had come open in his pocket.

He looked at the envelope; it had a 2½d. stamp on it, and it was directed to Captain John Fairclough, Post Office, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

An irresistible impulse prompted Tom Enifer to take the letter out and read it. It was a mere curiosity, and the sort of thing that some men would have resisted and others would have yielded

to readily. Tom Enifer yielded; and this was what he read :

‘MY DEAR HUSBAND,

‘It is nearly a year since I heard from you, which is very strange, and causes me to be naturally anxious. My position is a very trying one. People are continually asking me about you and where you are, and all I can say is that when I last heard from you you were in Kimberley. I don’t like to say that was twelve months ago, it would look so odd and people would think things. If you get this letter I want you to tell me plainly what you mean to do. Are you coming back or are you not ? You cannot expect me to go on living like this for ever. Up to the present I have respected you in every way, but your silence, always presuming you are alive and well, is very like desertion, and I don’t know what to think. I have written twice to your brother and once to your married sister, and both tell me that they have not heard from you since I did a year ago.

‘I will wait six months longer, and then if I do not hear from you I shall consider that I owe you no further allegiance, and am practically, if not legally, a free woman. I do not wish to say any

more now, but you cannot expect me to go on caring for and loving a man who does not think it even worth while to write to me. I feel it very keenly. I make every possible excuse, but I will not live as I am now living much longer. I will risk everything, and conclude myself to be a widow, and will marry again. Think of the position you have left me in, and if you receive this, wire me at the first opportunity. I suppose there is a telegraph station somewhere within a hundred miles or so of where you are.

‘Your affectionate wife,

‘ALICE.’

‘Well,’ exclaimed Tom, as he put the letter back in the envelope, ‘that’s a queer epistle, any way. So Mrs. Fairclough lives at No. 7, — Square, and her husband’s in Kimberley, and if he does not write within six months to say he is alive, she’ll marry again. There’s evidently a gentleman in the case already. He’s got a fair start; I wonder if the husband will come with a wet sail at the finish and just beat him on the post. By Jove! it’s an odd affair altogether, and I’m in the secret and nobody knows it. I wonder whether the gentleman she thinks of marrying knows it; I wonder if he’s

a sharp or a flat, and what the grass widow's playing at; I suppose she's young and pretty; there's a suggestion of that in the letter. It isn't the sort of letter an old ugly woman would write, and she wouldn't talk about being free to marry again—at least, I think not. I—I think I'll just see if I can't find out a little before I post that letter. The husband isn't a good correspondent, evidently. He can't be very anxious to hear from home, or he wouldn't let a year go by without writing to say what the state of his health was and inquiring how his good lady found herself.'

Mr. Tom Enifer was not quite sure what he was doing, but he was desperately hard up, and the idea had gradually occurred to him that he had got possession of a little bit of private information which might be of use to him. Had anyone suggested to him then that he saw visions of blackmail he would undoubtedly have denied the imputation. But something of the kind was lurking in his mind—desperate men do desperate things—and Tom Enifer's condition, though he hardly liked to confess it to himself, was desperate. This lady was probably rich—if in six months' time she got no reply to her letter she would marry, perhaps concealing from the man she married the fact that there



was a doubt about her husband's death. And then Tom Enifer's information would be under certain circumstances useful. But six months was a long time to wait, and might not the secret be useful even now? That would have to be thought out, and he would have to know a little more before he decided how to act.

The next day he set about trying to gain the extra knowledge he wanted. He watched the house all day, and he was rewarded to a certain extent. He saw a good-looking woman, elegantly dressed, come out of the house, and he ascertained from a crossing-sweeper, to whom she gave a penny, that the lady was Mrs. Fairclough, who lived at No. 7, and then he took the liberty of quietly following her. His experiment was not very successful in the morning. The lady only went down Regent Street and did a little shopping, and went back home again. But in the afternoon he saw a telegram delivered, and he thought that might mean something, and so he remained on duty. At seven in the evening the lady came out and got into a hansom which had been sent for, and the servant came out and closed the doors, and the lady told the cabman to drive to Sackville Street. It was an expensive experiment in Tom's hard-up condition,

but he made a reckless dash, and, hailing another hansom, drove to Sackville Street too. He stopped his man at the corner, and was just in time to see the lady get out and discharge her cabman and enter a house. He waited outside the house for half an hour, and then the lady came out with a gentleman, a tall, dark, good-looking man of about five-and-thirty, and they walked together as far as the Café Royal in Regent Street, and went upstairs into the dining-room. Tom couldn't afford a dinner at the Café Royal, and he thought he had seen enough for one day, and he might very well leave the rest for a future occasion. He had the address in Sackville Street, and he made up his mind he had now found the future husband, and would be able to give him a little attention later on. So he went on to the house of his friend who had given him a tip for the big race, and spent an hour with him, and managed to borrow a couple of sovereigns, which he sent off to a commission agent that night to back the horse, which was at 20 to 1.

And then he went home and looked at that letter which he had locked away in a drawer, but he couldn't make up his mind to post it yet.

The next day he went to Sackville Street, and having identified the house, he succeeded, after

considerable difficulty, in ascertaining that the tall, dark gentleman he had seen was a Mr. Charles Lorrimore, who had his private chambers on the second floor. Beyond that he could ascertain nothing, but he went away satisfied. He was certain that Mr. Charles Lorrimore was the gentleman for whose sake Mrs. Fairclough was anxious to know what her husband's intentions were.

On the following day the race came off, and his friend's 'dead cert,' for a wonder, won easily, and Tom Enifer was in possession of £40. The ruling passion got hold of him again at once—he forgot all his past experiences, and with this small capital tempted fortune again. Kempton Park races were on at the end of the week. He went, and on the first day gave the 40 'a chance,' and came home with a £50 note to the good. The next day he was less fortunate, but he cleared ten pounds, and now he was once more the possessor of £100.

Now that the excitement of the turf was on him again, he forgot all about the letter lying locked up in the drawer at home for a time. When he remembered it, he thought he wouldn't bother any more about the matter, but post it, and trouble no further about the secret which had come into his possession in such a peculiar way.

One night after returning from a race meeting where he had managed to run his winnings into £500, he went to the drawer, unlocked it, took the letter, re-read it, and put it into the envelope, and was about to fasten it down with some gum, when his wife, who had been visiting some friends, came in, and he slipped the letter into the envelope, and put it open into his pocket-book, which he had just had out to look at his winnings. His wife had come in hoping to find him at home; as her father was spending the evening at her friend's house, she was anxious that Tom should go back with her and finish the evening there, and as he hadn't been out with his wife for some time and he was in a very good humour over his run of luck, he at once consented to go.

It was a very merry evening, and after supper, when the spirits came upon the scene, Tom began to brag of his luck and his infallible system, etc., and pulled out his pocket-book, and showed a £500 note to the company. Then he said:

‘I changed that for a bookmaker this afternoon, and only a fortnight ago I started racing again with £2. That's not bad, is it?’

Mrs. Enifer's father shook his head. ‘Light come, light go, my boy,’ he said; ‘I'd very much

sooner have seen you making a bit less by hard work.' Tom shrugged his shoulders, and put the note back again in his book in a little bit of a huff, and soon afterwards he said to his wife, 'Come, Maggie, it's time to be going,' and they said 'Good-night' and went home.

The next morning Tom remembered the letter, and determined to post it. He couldn't find any gum, so he got a stick of sealing wax and sealed the envelope down, and went out to the post-office, which was close at hand, and slipped the letter into the box.

'There,' he said, 'that's off my mind. After all, the thing mightn't have been much use to me. There's nothing in it but a woman's threat of what she will do if her husband doesn't write to her, and there may be nothing in the Sackville Street business. No, it wouldn't have been a good game, and I should never have thought of it if I hadn't been so desperately hard up.'

After posting the letter he took a little walk, and went home to lunch. There was no big meeting on, and the little one was farther than Tom cared to journey, so he was having a quiet day with his wife.

After lunch the conversation turned on domestic

matters, and Maggie Enifer suggested that as Tom had made such a lot of money he might go out shopping with her, as she wanted to buy a new mantle.

Tom was nothing loath, but remembered that he had only a couple of sovereigns and a £500 note, and that he would have to get it changed somewhere where he was known, as it was rather big to offer over the counter. He took out his pocket-book, searched it in every compartment, and then turned as white as a sheet.

‘What’s the matter, Tom?’

‘The note’s gone!’ he exclaimed.

‘What, the five hundred?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nonsense, dear, feel in your pockets.’

Tom felt in every pocket; he turned the pocket-book inside out, he looked on the floor, in the sitting-room, in the bedroom, everywhere, but there was no sign of a note.

He jumped into a hansom, and drove to the house they had supped at on the previous evening. Nothing had been seen of the missing bank-note, and Tom came back the picture of despair.

The words of his father-in-law came back to him. ‘Light come, light go.’ The note had

gone. In some mysterious way it had disappeared.

Tom went off to the Bank of England, but they could do nothing—he didn't know the number. Then he telegraphed to the bookmaker, and the reply came back that he also had not taken the number, having taken the note on the course, but he knew of whom, and he would endeavour to get it if possible.

It was a week before the bookmaker replied, and then it was only to tell Tom that he had failed in obtaining the number.

Tom Enifer had lost all his capital again, and, as he mournfully said, he hadn't even had a run for his money.

For a week he was in an utter state of despondency; he didn't know what to do, he hadn't anyone who would lend him any money to start betting again, and this dreadful loss had emphasized his father-in-law's warning. He felt that his luck was dead out, and he began seriously to consider whether anything certain, if it was only a couple of pounds a week, wouldn't be better than the glorious uncertainty of the turf.

The idea of watching Sackville Street or the pretty grass widow he had abandoned. There was

nothing to be made at that game now—even if he had so far stilled his conscience as to descend to such infamy.

He tramped about the City in search of a situation in vain. There were hundreds of applicants for every place that was vacant, and he had no character to give, having been three years out of employment. He couldn't very well say he had been racing in the interval. That is not a recommendation in the City.

Just when everything looked hopeless his father-in-law came to the rescue. A friend of his in the country, a well-to-do tradesman, wanted a clerk, and he succeeded in getting the berth for Tom, so he and his wife bade adieu to London and went to live in a little town in the West of England. The salary was small, but it was certain, and after the first shock of the change of life, Tom Enifer settled down into a steady, hard-working commercial clerk once more. But there were many occasions on which he felt that a portion of that lost £500 would have come in useful.

Two years afterwards Tom, having given complete satisfaction to his employer, was, on the latter retiring from business, strongly recommended to a wholesale house in the City, and his



application being successful, Tom and his wife came back once more to London, this time with a salary of £200 a year, and finding their old apartments vacant, they took them.

One evening, taking a stroll through the West End, Tom found himself in the square where two years previously he had picked up the letter to Captain Fairclough. The episode and all that followed it came back vividly to his mind, and he stopped opposite No. 7 and looked up at the windows, and wondered what had happened since that memorable evening, and if the Captain had ever replied to the letter, and if not, whether Mrs. Fairclough had risked the marriage of which she had hinted in her strange epistle to her husband.

While he was gazing thoughtfully at the house a servant came to the door and whistled for a cab, and Tom instantly became interested in the proceedings.

Presently a hansom came up and the servant went indoors; a minute afterwards a lady and a gentleman came out. Tom could see them distinctly in the light of the hall lamp as they stood at the front-door.

He knew the lady in a moment—it was Mrs. Fairclough; but the gentleman he had never seen

before. It was not the dark gentleman of Sackville Street. While they were at the door talking together, to Tom's utter astonishment the dark gentleman came downstairs and joined them.

'The stupid girl's got a hansom,' said the lady to him, 'instead of a four-wheeler.'

'Never mind,' said the strange gentleman. 'We can all three get in it. You can sit on my knee, Charlie.' And then they all three got into the cab and drove off.

'That's a rum go,' said Tom to himself. The servant was at the door, and he thought he would hazard a question. So he crossed the road, and said: 'I beg your pardon, but wasn't one of those gentlemen Captain Fairclough?'

'Yes, he was.'

'Ah, you'll excuse me asking, but I used to know him years ago, and I thought I recognised him. Has he been back from Africa long?'

The girl, presuming that this was someone who was inquiring legitimately, answered at once:

'Oh yes, about a year.'

'And the dark gentleman was Mr. Lorrimore, of Sackville Street?'

'Yes; missus's brother!'

‘Ah, thank you; say Mr. Jones called. I haven’t a card. Good-evening!’

‘So,’ said Tom, as he walked away, ‘I was on the wrong tack, and that blessed letter wouldn’t have been much good. It was her brother. I suppose the letter brought the Captain to his senses, and back to his wife. I wish I could find out. I was in the romance at the beginning. I should like to know how it ended.’

And that set him thinking of his lost £500 note. He lost it the very night he posted that letter, and he had often thought since that he might have pulled it out of his pocket-book while taking the letter out, and in some mysterious way it had disappeared.

It was on the Saturday before a bank holiday that Tom had seen Mrs. Fairclough again. Thinking of his lost note set him thinking of racing. On bank holiday there was a meeting at Kempton Park. He wouldn’t bet—he never meant to bet again—but he made up his mind he would just go down for the day and ‘have a look round.’ It would be a day out, and it wouldn’t do him any harm.

He went, and thinking he might come across some old acquaintances, he paid his money and went into Tattersall’s ring.

One of the first persons he saw was the bookmaker of whom he had received the £500 note.

He didn't recognise Tom, but Tom recognised him, and reminded him of the circumstances under which they last met.

'By Jove! that's odd,' said the bookmaker. 'I'd lost your address, or I'd have written to you. I got the number of that note a few months ago, and made a memo of it on the back of my book, in case I ever saw you again, but I suppose you found it?'

'No,' said Tom, 'I never did, and I never shall now. It's been paid long ago, I expect; but you may as well give me the number.'

'Here it is—A-C 32100. I'm afraid it's not much good to you now.'

Tom thought not either, but he took the number, and he went next day, in his dinner-hour, to the Bank of England and made inquiries. The books were referred to, as is usual in case of a lost note, after Tom had given full particulars, and Tom was informed that the note had been presented through a firm of bankers in the City, and, of course, paid.

Tom knew that he had no claim now, as he hadn't stopped the note, and thinking that he

might have to spend a good deal of time or money in tracing it from banker to banker, and from hand to hand, and yet anxious, if possible, to find out how it had come into anyone else's possession, he thought he would ignore the fact that he had learnt it had been paid, and risk a few shillings in advertising it, so he sent the following advertisement to the *Daily Telegraph* :

‘Lost, about two years ago, a Bank of England note for £500. Number A-C 32100. Will anyone having found the same, or anyone in whose possession it came about that period, kindly communicate with T. E., No. 19, — Street, W.C.?’

Two days afterwards, when Tom returned from the City, his wife informed him that a gentleman had called. He wanted to see T. E. about his advertisement. She had told him that Tom wouldn't be home till seven, and he had promised to call again after that hour.

About eight o'clock a ring came at the bell, and the landlady came up to inform Tom that a gentleman wished to see him.

‘It's about the note,’ said Tom. ‘Show him up.’

A minute afterwards a gentleman walked into the room, and Tom, directly he saw him, gave a

great gasp of astonishment. It was Captain Fairclough.

‘You are T. E.,’ said the Captain.

‘Yes—I—I am.’

‘Two years ago you lost a £500 note.’

‘Yes,’ said Tom, wondering what on earth the Captain could know about it.

‘Well,’ said the Captain, ‘you can have it again if you explain one circumstance. How the deuce did it come to be sent to me to Africa in a letter from my wife?’

Tom turned hot and cold.

‘I don’t understand you,’ he stammered.

‘It is rather hard to understand,’ said the Captain. ‘My wife never had the note, but in a letter written to me by her, and received by me some eighteen months ago in an outlandish part of Africa, there was that identical note. I took the number directly I got it, and carried it about with me for a month before I got to a place where there was a banker to change it. I concluded that she had sent it to me thinking—which was true—that I was stranded, and hadn’t the money to make the big journey across country and get home. To my utter astonishment, when I did reach home I found she knew nothing about the note, and assured me

she closed her letter herself and sent it to the post by a servant. How the deuce did your lost £500 note get into the letter ?

‘I can’t say, I’m sure,’ gasped Tom ; ‘it quite takes my breath away.’

‘You can prove that the note was yours ?’ said the Captain, looking round the room and thinking it did not look the abode of a capitalist.

‘Oh yes ; I was a racing man at the time, and received it from a bookmaker. He only gave me the date and the number of the note the other day ; that is why I didn’t advertise before. The date was September 30.’

‘That’s odd !’ exclaimed the Captain. ‘My wife’s letter was dated the 26th, and she says it was posted the day she wrote it. I don’t know what the postal date on the envelope was, as I tore it up in Africa. How could your note have got into my letter four days after it was posted ?’

Tom couldn’t offer any explanation, but he began to understand what had happened. When he put the folded note back after showing it to his father-in-law, it must have accidentally slipped inside the open envelope, which was then in the pocket-book, and taking the envelope out afterwards

with the flap down, and sealing it without opening it again, he didn't notice it.

'Well,' said the Captain after a pause, 'it's a mystery, but if you can prove by the person who paid it you that the note is yours you shall have the money—it clearly doesn't belong to me. Good-evening.'

All that night Tom wondered what on earth he could do. Here was his £500 come back again, but he knew he would have to make his story very plausible to get it.

After all, he hadn't done anything criminal, because he had posted the letter; and he hadn't stolen it, and part of the delay in posting was accidental.

By the next morning he had made up his mind. He called on the Captain and made a clean breast of everything. The Captain was furious at first, but eventually calmed down, and then Mrs. Fairclough, as Tom knew the contents of the letter, explained that she had written it out of pique, and had no intention of carrying out her threat, and was quite satisfied with her husband's explanation of his long silence.

And eventually Tom received his £500, not in notes this time, but in an open cheque which he



duly cashed, and the money he at once deposited in a bank as a nest-egg for a rainy day. He has never risked any of it on the turf, and he has made up his mind that if ever he picks up another unposted letter he will drop it into the nearest pillar-box at once.

Prying into the correspondence of a Grass Widow very nearly cost Tom Enifer £500.

## VI.

### *THE HUNDRED-POUND NOTE.*

ON October 14, 189—, all London was startled by the report that the Hon. Tom Laureston, a young officer in the Guards, had been found dead in Regent's Park with a hundred-pound note firmly clutched in his hand.

From the first it was evident that a mysterious crime had been committed. The body was first noticed by a working man going to his work at five in the morning. It lay close against the railings of the Park opposite Hanover Terrace. The man went at once through Hanover Gate into Park Road in search of a policeman, who returned with him, ringing up a doctor on his way. The doctor, directly he arrived upon the scene, pronounced life extinct, and expressed his opinion that death had occurred about five hours previously, or shortly after midnight. A closer examination of

the body showed that there was a terrible wound in the back of the skull, but this was accounted for by the presence of a large jagged flint stone on the pathway. The unfortunate man had evidently in his fall struck his head violently upon this, and the injury was sufficient to cause death.

But that the fall had not been caused by fainting or anything of that kind was proved by the state of the face, on which there were marks of violence. It was evident that the dead man had been subjected to a severe assault, and it was probable that he had been brutally ill-treated, knocked down, and left to his fate.

The hundred-pound note clasped in the man's hand was a puzzle to the police, who took up the case vigorously as soon as they had ascertained who the dead man was.

Their first theory was that an attempt had been made to rob Mr. Laureston, and that he had clutched the note to prevent his assailant taking it from him. But the pockets of the victim had evidently not been touched. Gold was found upon him.

The number of the note was 2-K 70006, and this was traced at once. It had been paid over the counter of a West-End branch of the London and

County Bank to Tom Laureston himself about a week previously.

Mr. Laureston's movements on the fatal evening were also traced. He had occupied a stall at a West End Theatre, where a popular play was being performed, and he had afterwards walked as far as Clarence Gate with a friend who was living in St. John's Wood, and had then said good-night. He himself was staying at the time with his mother, who had a house in Hanover Terrace, and he was on his way home when he was attacked.

The idea of an attempted robbery was eventually dismissed by the police. A thief would have searched the senseless man's pockets, and also have taken the note from his hand. Directly it was agreed that the young officer was not the victim of a midnight robbery, the mystery became deeper. What object could anyone have in brutally assaulting him and leaving him for dead on a public thoroughfare?

Though closely questioned, the friends and brother officers of Tom Laureston could give no information. Laureston was a man immensely popular. He was not known to have a single enemy, and no one who knew him could offer the

slightest suggestion which would furnish a clue for the police to follow up.

But there was one person who could have given the information, and that was Miss Sybil Carlyon, the charming soprano, who had lately taken London by storm in a new opera bouffe.

Sybil Carlyon first heard of the murder when she arrived at the theatre the following evening. Everybody was talking about it.

‘Tom Laureston murdered!’ she exclaimed, and for a moment it looked as though she were going to faint.

But she recovered herself with a great effort.

‘How—how did it happen?’ she gasped; ‘tell me all about it.’

The woman who told her watched her narrowly. It was known in theatrical circles that Tom Laureston had been one of her acquaintances, and it had been whispered that he had fallen violently in love with her. But she had always laughed when his name was mentioned, and said, ‘Oh, nonsense! He’s a charming fellow, and we are excellent friends, but that is all.’

Sybil Carlyon heard the story through to the end and went to her dressing-room. How she got through that evening she wondered herself. But

her nerves were strong and her will indomitable. But after the performance was over, and she was alone at home in her charming little flat, she paced up and down the room and grew hysterical.

‘My note!’ she cried, ‘my note—the note Tom gave me, the note I sent to Frank Dormer! What does it mean—what can it mean? She went to her despatch box and opened it, and took out her little red morocco memorandum book. She looked at one of the pages, and then at an evening newspaper.

‘Yes,’ she exclaimed, ‘it is certain—2-K 70006.’

She had taken the precaution to make a memorandum of the number before sending it away in a registered letter. Having satisfied herself on this point, she went to the fire, dropped the little red morocco book into it, and waited until it was burned.

Then she sat down and tried to imagine what it could mean, and to make up her mind what she ought to do.

Her position was a terrible one. In a few days her engagement to a young Earl, who had fallen madly in love with her, and asked her to be his wife, would be made known. If she came forward

and gave information that this note had been in her possession, and that she herself had received it from Tom Laureston, and posted it to Frank Dormer, there would be a public scandal. And Frank—what would happen to him? In what way was he connected with the tragedy?

Sybil Carlyon thought and thought far into the night, but she could see no course open to her but absolute silence, and so with a great effort dismissing the tragedy from her mind, she went to bed and slept.

The next morning she rose early, went herself to the post-office and sent off a telegram. It was addressed to Frank Dormer, at his chambers in Langham Street, and was a request that he would come and see her at once.

That afternoon Frank Dormer called, and Sybil, directly she saw him, knew that her worst fears were realized. He was so altered that she scarcely knew him. He was barely thirty, and he looked forty. His face was deathly pale, and his brown beard already had streaks of gray in it.

‘You sent for me,’ he said, as he held out his hand, which she did not take; ‘what do you want with me?’

‘You know what I want. I want to hear from

your own lips what you know of Tom Laureston's death.'

'You want the truth?'

'Yes, the whole truth!'

The young man looked at her sternly for a moment, and then in a cold, hard voice he said:

'I did it.'

'You, Frank—you!'

'Yes; can't you guess why?'

'I know how madly jealous you were, but you never had any right to be jealous of Laureston.'

'Not jealous of him!' cried the man, clenching his fists, and speaking fiercely and quickly. 'Not jealous of the man whose money you sent to me, your lover—God forgive me!—your miserable dupe.'

Sybil Carlyon shrugged her shoulders.

'If you say so, it is useless for me to attempt to deny it. I ceased to care for you because of your insults, your insane jealousy, your mad rages; but Tom Laureston was never my lover.'

'He gave you that money. I tell you I know it. When I received the £100 and your cold, cruel letter, saying that you begged to return the sum you had borrowed of me, and that you did not wish to see me again, I knew you must have obtained the money from a man. You are too



heavily in debt yourself to have found it without assistance. I watched you, I watched outside your house day after day, and I saw Laureston go in. When I received the note I set to work at once and traced it to Laureston. Then I went mad. It was a foul, cowardly insult to send me that money at all; to send me his money was infamous. I determined that I would meet him, tell him what you were, and give him his money back again.

‘I saw him in the theatre that night. I followed him till he went into the Park, then I touched him on the shoulder and he turned round.

“‘Who are you? What do you want?’” he said.

‘I told him that I was the lover of Sybil Carlyon, that it was for him that she had put me aside, and I begged to return him his money. I thrust the note into his hand.

‘Then he said something which maddened me. He told me that I was a coward to betray a woman in such a way, and then, scarcely knowing what I did, I seized him by the throat and struck him full in the face with all my force. He reeled and fell, and I walked away. It was only the next morning that I learnt that he was dead.’

‘You killed him, you!’ cried the woman, her

black eyes glistening with rage ; ‘you betrayed me to him like the coward that you are, and killed him, and he was never my lover, only my friend, who helped me to pay you the miserable debt I owed you.’

‘It was an insult to me ; you know it was no debt. It was given to you freely when you wanted money.’

‘I did not choose any longer to be under any obligation to you.’

‘But you put yourself under one to him.’

‘Yes, but it was an honourable one. Well, it serves me right for ever caring for such a man as you have proved yourself to be. Now what are you going to do ?’

‘Give myself up. I should have done so at once but for you ; your name must be mixed up with the story if I tell the truth.’

‘No, no, you mustn’t do that ; no living soul but ourselves must know. Frank !’ said Sybil, changing her tone and looking at her former lover gently, ‘do you—do you care for me a little still ?’

‘Care for you, Sybil ! do you think I should have been the madman that I was that night if I had not loved you still with my whole heart and soul ?’

‘Then prove your love!’

‘How can I do it?’

‘By carrying this secret with you to the grave!’

‘For your sake——’

‘For my sake! It is all too terrible. I know and you know that as far as poor Tom Laureston’s death is concerned it was an accident, but you struck him and left him senseless on the ground. God knows how it might appear against you, and what hope would there ever be for me again, of—if—oh, I cannot bear to think of it! For your own sake as well as for mine the secret of Tom Laureston’s death must be kept by both of us until our dying day. No one knows that I sent you that note. I never told Laureston what it was for. No one ever saw you with it in your possession?’

‘No one.’

‘Then, as nothing can undo the past, silence is best for us both. Come, promise.’

Frank Dormer looked steadily at this woman who had wrecked his life for ever. He knew her now. He knew she was without heart, without honour, only a selfish, worthless woman, but his love for her remained unchanged. He wanted to go to the police and tell the truth and boldly answer

for his crime ; but he felt that it would be ruin to her, that in some way it must be bound to come out that he had been her lover, and that he was jealous of Laureston, and then—yes, he would do as she asked.

She held out her hand to him. He took it, clasped it for a moment, and then without another word he went out of her sight, and Sybil Carlyon never saw him again.

A week afterwards he sailed from Liverpool for America. When the vessel arrived at New York the captain reported that when three days out a passenger had jumped overboard and every effort to save him had been in vain.

That passenger was Frank Dormer.

When Sybil Carlyon heard of the suicide, she gave a sigh of relief. She had been haunted by the fear that, in spite of his promise, Frank Dormer might one day betray himself. Now the last fear was gone. The secret of Tom Laureston's death was hers alone, and she was quite safe in her own hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three months after the suicide of Frank Dormer the engagement of the beautiful soprano, Sybil Carlyon, to the young Earl of Galvaton was

announced in the society papers. Lord Galvaton was a young man of five-and-twenty, blessed with a large fortune, which had been made in trade by his grandfather, a successful and miserly Scotch merchant, who to the day of his death lived in a small house in an unpretentious street, and went to bed early in order to save the gas. Lord Galvaton's father made a better use of the money, became a politician, and for his great services, political and financial, to the Conservative cause, was made a peer immediately after a General Election. He did not survive his honours long, and was succeeded by his son, a lad of twenty, who at once commenced to honour the drama with his patronage.

He was popularly supposed to be the mainstay of a West End Temple of Art, in which comic opera was produced from time to time with a luxury of dress and appointments which made it absolutely impossible as a profitable speculation, and rumour had it that a young lady who sang badly and acted worse, but who always had the best parts given to her, was the magnet which constantly attracted fresh supplies of capital to the manager's yawning coffers.

When, therefore, the announcement of Lord

Galvaton's engagement to Sybil Carlyon, who was the star at another house, appeared in the society papers, the people who knew something — or thought they knew something — were taken completely by surprise.

No one had ever seen Lord Galvaton and Sybil together, except at certain aristocratic houses where the host and hostess laid themselves out for the entertainment of fashionable Thespians, and peeresses and actors, and actresses and peers, mixed together on friendly terms, and bored or amused each other as the case might be.

Sybil had fascinated the young Earl at once, and he had contrived to get invitations to several Belgravian luncheon parties at which she was the Bohemian star. But he was a little frightened of her, and had hesitated to allow his admiration to be generally observed.

But Sybil, who was quick-witted in such matters, had not been slow to pursue her conquest, and, knowing the weakness of Galvaton's character, she had at once determined to make a bold *coup* for a coronet. Her first move was to quarrel with Frank Dormer and rid herself of his jealous espionage. She knew how sensitive he was, and she had resolved to insult him in a way which she

believed he would never forgive. It was with this idea that she had borrowed £100 from Tom Laureston, and sent it to her former 'friend.' She didn't mind Frank being jealous of Laureston, as 'there was nothing in it'; but she was particularly anxious that he should know nothing of her plans with regard to Galvaton, until she had that young nobleman absolutely at her mercy.

It did not take her very long to bring Galvaton to his knees, and he soon found out that if he intended to court her it would have to be *pour le bon motif*. He was so completely fascinated by her that, when after an attempt on his part to make her understand what his offer of 'sincere friendship' meant she sent him a curt note requesting that he would not call upon her again, he sat down at once and wrote her a long explanation, in which he declared that he had not the slightest intention of insulting her, and that the proudest moment of his life would be the one in which she consented to become Lady Galvaton.

To that letter he received a guarded reply. Sybil was naturally flattered by his offer, she wrote, and she was not at all insensible to the love he professed for her, but she was not a designing woman, and she felt that in a matter in which

the whole happiness of their future lives was concerned they could not be too cautious. She would meet Lord Galvaton if he wished it in public at the houses of their mutual friends, but on no account could she allow him to pose as her lover, to call upon her except as the ordinary visitor, or to see her at the theatre. She was bound to consider her own reputation, and it would be exceedingly dangerous to her if, after being seen about with her continually, he were to change his mind or to yield to family influence and endeavour to be released from his promise. If Lord Galvaton wished, she would be engaged to him for three months without in any way appearing to be more than acquaintances, and if at the end of that time he choose to renew his offer, she would accept it and allow the engagement to be made public.

To this arrangement the young lord eventually consented. To a certain extent it suited him, as it gave him time to withdraw himself from the theatrical speculation in which he was involved, and to gradually drop the 'set' with which he was mixed up in connection with it.

Sybil Carlyon played her cards well, and after the first shock of Laureston's death and Frank Dormer's suicide wore off she dismissed both



tragedies from her mind completely, and comported herself with that modesty and dignity which she felt was most befitting under the altered circumstances.

At the end of the three months Lord Galvaton formally renewed his offer of marriage and Sybil accepted it, and then the first serious difficulty arose.

Lord Galvaton had kept his engagement secret from everyone, and 'everyone' included the members of his own family. His mother, an excellent woman with strong ideas on certain subjects, heard of it first through the press announcements, and at once came up to town to see her son, and to request him at once to assure her that the report was absolutely without foundation.

The young Earl had dreaded the interview, for he stood in considerable awe of his mother. But he knew it would have to come, and he braced himself up for the occasion, and in his own expressive language prepared himself 'to face the music.'

He apologized to his mother for not having informed her of his engagement; he knew that he had acted wrongly, but he thought he should like to have an opportunity of introducing Sybil to her after the engagement was announced instead of

before. He knew his mother's prejudice against the stage, and he dreaded her opposition. He assured her that Sybil Carlyon was a lady of irreproachable character and excellent birth. Her father had been a gentleman farmer (as a matter of fact he had been a small farmer and cattledealer in Hertfordshire, and had been twice bankrupt), and she had only taken to the profession as a means of supporting an invalid mother, who had lived with her until she died a year ago. Sybil was, in fact, everything that was good, and he felt sure that his mother had only to see her to approve his choice.

Lady Galvaton listened to all her son had to say, but it made no impression on her. She disapproved of the theatre, she disapproved of actresses, and she determined to do all in her power to break the engagement off.

She was a lady not to talk, but to do, and so, finding her son insensible to argument, she bade him good day and drove off at once to Mr. Frodsham, the family solicitor, to ask for his advice. Mr. Frodsham had heard the startling news—in fact, he had read it in the papers, and he had expected a visit from her ladyship. As a man of the world, he felt that it was not a desirable

marriage for the young Earl. As a man of the world he knew something of the theatre, and had a little private information with regard to Sybil Carlyon, which did not quite bear out the story the Earl had told his mother.

Lady Galvaton was anxious to know what that private information was, and on condition that she would consider it as absolutely confidential until he gave her permission to use it he imparted it to her.

Mr. Frodsham was the solicitor of the Laureston family, and the papers of poor Tom Laureston had come into his possession. Among the letters was one from Sybil Carlyon, written only a few days before the murder took place, viz., on the 9th of October. It was a short little letter, but Mr. Frodsham thought it might be important; at any rate, he had directly he found it employed a private inquiry agent to look into certain matters, and he was now awaiting his report with considerable curiosity.

The letter which Mr. Frodsham handed to Lady Galvaton to read was as follows :

‘ DEAR MR. LAURESTON,

‘ Thank you very much for your kind offer. I will repay you at the very first opportunity. Let

it be notes, and not a cheque, as it is to send away to a person who is worrying me.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘SYBIL CARLYON.’

Lady Galvaton read the note twice and laid it down.

‘I don’t see,’ she said, ‘that this proves anything except that Miss Carlyon borrowed money from Mr. Laureston. There is nothing in the note to suggest anything but that it was a kind offer of assistance on his part.’

‘Quite so,’ replied the lawyer; ‘but Tom Laureston was murdered on the night of the 13th of the same month—that is, four days afterwards—and in his hand was found a hundred-pound note. That note he drew from his bank on the 10th of October, which would be the day on which he received Miss Carlyon’s acceptance of his offer. It is quite on the cards that the secret of that mysterious hundred pound note is in Miss Carlyon’s possession, and if it is——’

‘Well, if it is——’

‘I don’t think we shall have much trouble with her. The note is still in my possession; I asked the family to be allowed to keep it, as I have always

believed it would one day be a clue to Laureston's death, although the police refused to see any connection between the note and the motive for the murder. They believed he had it about him, and when assaulted, thinking it was with the intention of robbery, he took the note from his pocket, and clutched it in his hand to save it.'

'But surely you do not suspect the woman——'

'Had anything to do with the attack on Laureston—no, not for a moment, but I believe the person who was "worrying her" and for whom she wanted the money had. At any rate, I'm going to follow up the clue for what it is worth, and I'll let you know the result as soon as possible.'

Mr. Frodsham was an elderly solicitor with an aristocratic family connection, and as such he had become strongly impressed in the course of a long career with the truth of the excellent French proverb, '*Cherchez la femme.*'

From the first he had inclined to the belief that the mystery of Tom Laureston's death would never be explained until he had found the woman.

Directly he came upon Sybil Carlyon's letter among the unfortunate young Guardsman's papers he felt convinced that at last he had a clue.

Whither that clue would lead him he didn't endeavour to think. All he wanted to do was to follow it up and see exactly how far it would lead; and if he had needed any further incentive to activity, it was furnished by the visit of Lady Galvaton and the announcement of the young lord's engagement to the 'popular actress.'

When the agent he had set to work came with his report, it was not a very elaborate one, but it was at least consistent with the solicitor's theory, and established a direct connection between Miss Carlyon and Tom Laureston. On the day that Mr. Laureston had cashed his cheque at the bank and received a hundred-pound note in exchange, he had been driven to the bank in a hansom cab; the cabman had been found, and had stated that after Mr. Laureston came out of the bank he drove him to his club, where he remained some little time, and then came out and told the cabman to drive him to 10, — Street, Russell Square, where Mr. Laureston got out and handed a note to the attendant who was at the door, got into the cab again, and drove to the barracks, where he dismissed the cabman.

The inquiry agent had been to No. 10, a house let out in flats, and had ascertained the names of

all the people living there at that date, and had taken them down. Among them the lawyer found the name of Sybil Carlyon. She was living there at that time, but had since moved. The attendant who was there at the time had left, and no one could give any information as to a note being left that day.

This was so far satisfactory. It established the fact that Tom Laureston with £100 in his possession had driven to his club, written a letter and left it at Sybil Carlyon's house, and that was probably his reply to her request to send 'notes.' He had enclosed one note and left it himself.

The next day Mr. Frodsham, having ascertained Miss Carlyon's address, put on his pleasantest professional smile, and set out to call upon the lady. He had not written to say he was coming, having determined to take his chance. He sent up his card with a request that he might see Miss Carlyon on a matter of business, and was presently ushered into the lady's apartment.

'You must pardon this visit, Miss Carlyon,' said the solicitor, fixing his eyes upon the young lady and mentally calculating her powers of dissimulation; 'but in going over the papers of a

client of mine, who died some time since, I found a letter addressed to him by you.'

'Indeed !' exclaimed Sybil uneasily ; ' and what was your client's name ?'

'Tom Laureston.'

Sybil Carlyon started, but regained her composure instantly.

'Poor fellow!' she said ; 'I knew him, but not very well, you know. I don't remember sending him any letter beyond one of ordinary courtesy. Do you call upon all the ladies whose letters you may happen to find among a dead client's papers ?'

'Oh no ! I burn them, as a rule ; but in this instance the letter suggested that you may be able to give me a little explanation.'

'Indeed ; pray proceed.'

'The letter, my dear young lady, is dated the 9th of October, and it requests my client to send you some unstated amount of money in notes.'

The colour began to leave Sybil Carlyon's face. She remembered the letter now. She had always believed that Laureston would naturally have destroyed it directly he received it.

'This is rather unusual, Mr. Frodsham,' she exclaimed, glancing at the card, 'and to me very



painful. I really don't think you have any right to come to me on such a matter.'

'You will excuse me, Miss Carlyon, I am sure, when I tell you that I come here at the request of Lady Galvaton, to whose son you are engaged.'

'Lady Galvaton!' gasped Sybil.

'Yes, I am also her solicitor.'

'You—you have shown them my letter, a letter addressed to Mr. Laureston! You have betrayed your trust—surely the papers of a client are sacred?'

'Quite so; but, you see, I thought it better to keep this matter in the family instead of handing the letter to the police as bearing perhaps on Mr. Laureston's fate. That I have still a right to do if——'

'If what——'

'If you do not tell me what you did with the hundred-pound note that Mr. Laureston left at your house for you on the 10th of October—the note which was found clutched in his hand when his body was discovered.'

\* \* \* \* \*

A quarter of an hour later Mr. Frodsham bade Miss Carlyon good-day. He was satisfied that she had told him the truth, and that no good purpose

would be served by making the story public. Frank Dormer was dead and beyond the reach of justice, even if it could have been proved that he was actually guilty of Laureston's death.

But his visit and his threats had answered their purpose. Sybil Carlyon had by her conduct placed herself completely at his mercy, and he had made his terms. Two days afterwards a paragraph appeared in most of the leading papers, stating there was no truth in the announcement of a forthcoming marriage between Miss Carlyon and Lord Galvaton. And Lord Galvaton when he heard the facts was the first to congratulate himself upon the turn affairs had taken.

Miss Carlyon shortly after accepted an engagement in New York, and she is still starring in America. The mystery of the death of Tom Laureston remains a mystery still, and to this day when his fate is discussed everyone has a special theory of his own about the hundred-pound note.

## VII.

### *THE SENIOR PARTNER.*

YES, sir, it is an odd name for a bath-chairman, 'The Senior Partner,' but that's the one I'm known by among the other men. You see, when we all stand at the corner here waiting for a job, we talk over our affairs to each other, and I've told 'em my story, and they know all about me, and how I came to be pulling a chair about, and they gave me the name after hearing my story, and it's stuck to me.

Ten years ago I never thought I should come to this sort of thing, but one never knows what is going to happen in this world. If I had ever tried to imagine what I should become, I should have pictured myself in a nice house, surrounded by every comfort, and receiving an excellent income without working for it. As to dragging old ladies and gentlemen and invalids round Regent's Park

in a bath-chair—well, that is the very last thing that would have entered my head.

I was living in a pretty little semi-detached villa at Highgate with my wife, on a decent little income which I derived from house property left me by my father, who had been a builder. I wasn't rich, or even well-to-do, but I was comfortable, and finding after my father died that I didn't understand the building trade sufficiently well to carry it on at a profit, I gave up building, settled the debts, and made up my mind to live quietly on the money my rents brought me in.

Next door to me there lived a very pleasant gentleman indeed. He had been a captain in the army, and had retired on half-pay. His garden and my garden joined, and we first struck up an acquaintance over the garden wall, and gradually got quite friendly; and as he lived quite alone, having no wife or family, he used often to come in and smoke a pipe with me, and spend the evening in our little parlour, and my wife was always glad for him to come, as he was a lively gentleman, and could talk—goodness, how he could talk! He had had most wonderful adventures all over the world, and had been wounded in ever so many places in ever so many battles; but he wasn't a bit proud,

and our humble fare was always good enough for him, and whenever he stayed to supper he had an excellent appetite. He was a very shrewd man of the world as well as a soldier, and he had such good business ideas that I often consulted him about my own affairs and took his advice.

Whenever he went away for a week or two, which he did sometimes, we used to miss him very much, and my wife was always pleased when I used to come in from my morning stroll and say, 'My dear, the Captain's come back.' My wife, God bless her! was as good and patient a little woman as ever breathed, but I suppose we always being together, no business, you see, taking me out like other men, the Captain's company was a bit of a change, and brightened us both up a bit.

We didn't go into the Captain's house, because, as he explained, being a bachelor, his place wasn't as comfortable as ours, and his old housekeeper was a wretched cook, and so he only had a few male visitors now and then who didn't mind making shift.

I used to see these male visitors sometimes—they used to come of an evening generally—and I can't say I thought very much of them. Being an army

man, I thought the Captain would have had similar visitors, military men like himself, and that sort of thing ; but the men that came to see him were more like shabby, broken-down City men, except one who wore a lot of jewellery and looked like a Jew.

Still, it was no business of mine, and I should never have referred to it had not the Captain one evening himself informed me that he was tired of doing nothing and was thinking of going into business, and that the gentleman with the jewellery—Mr. Moss he called him—had a rattling good thing in view, and had offered him a partnership. My wife looked up when he said that, and remarked that she should never have thought that a captain would go into trade. He explained that it was not trade—it was business, almost a professional matter, but one that anybody could be associated with without loss of dignity ; but he was afraid he hadn't quite got the capital. Then he began to ask me how I was situated, and if I hadn't ever thought of doing anything if there was money to be made ; and I told him all my property was house property, and I didn't know anything about business, and if I had done I hadn't any money to risk, my income from the houses I owned being

only just enough to let us jog on comfortably as we were doing now.

The Captain said I was quite right—a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush—and then my wife served us up a nice little hot supper, and after that we sat by the fire and smoked while the wife did some sewing, and the Captain told us one of his wonderful adventures in India with a tiger; and then he dropped into battles, and made our hair stand on end with the awful things he had seen till it was time to go to bed.

Once or twice after that, when the Captain came in, he seemed a bit worried, and he explained that for want of capital he was losing a big affair that there was a fortune in, and he was afraid unless he could manage to make up the amount he wanted very soon, his friend Moss would go somewhere else, and he should lose the chance for ever. ‘I’ve got a few hundreds put by,’ he said, ‘but beyond that I’ve only my half-pay, and, though some of my friends are well off, I’ve never borrowed money of them in my life, and I’m too proud to go to them now.’

He would talk about his big scheme without telling me what it was for a time, and then he would say, ‘There! what’s the use of worrying

about it—if it can't be, it can't be,' and would light his pipe and take his whisky-and-water and begin to talk about something else.

Well, one day a very wonderful thing happened. I received a letter from a firm of solicitors in the City informing me that an uncle of mine who had quarrelled with my father many years ago, and had broken off all acquaintance with him, had died suddenly immensely rich, and had, among other legacies, left me £2,000.

Two thousand pounds ! It seemed such a little fortune that I could hardly believe it. 'Read that, missus,' I said to the wife, handing her the letter, 'and tell me if it's a fairy tale or true.' She was as astonished as I was, and she couldn't quite believe it at first, so after breakfast I dressed myself in my best and I went straight to the office of these City lawyers and had an interview with them.

There was no doubt about it. The money was mine, and as soon as certain formalities had been completed it would be paid into my bank.

I went home full of it, and the wife, directly she heard my footstep coming up the gravel path in front of our little villa, was at the door to meet me to know the news. 'It's all right, old girl !' I



cried out. 'It's real hard cash, and we've got £2,000 of our own money this very day, and that's—let me see, at five per cent., that would be—a—a hundred a year.'

I dropped my voice a bit as I finished the calculation, and my wife's face fell a bit too. There's such a difference between £2,000 and £2 a week. The one's romance, and the other's reality. The one is a dream of wealth, and the other is a slight addition to your income.

I don't know how it was that it never struck me that our new fortune wasn't such a wonderful fortune after all. Up to then I had only seen it as two thousand sovereigns; now it had dwindled down to two pounds.

I actually felt discontented, and I think my wife had the same sort of feeling. It was the big figures that had dazzled us; the little ones took the gilt off the gingerbread.

'I'll talk it over with the Captain,' I said to my wife, 'he's a good business man;' and then I sent into the Captain's and said we should be very pleased if he would come and drink a cup of tea with us.

The Captain liked our teas, being always a man for good living, and my wife, who was a country

farmer's daughter, knew how to cook and was a great hand at cakes of all kinds for tea—potato cakes, and dripping cakes, and cakes cooked in the oven, that melted in your mouth, and in our prosperous days we always had cakes for tea when we had company, and there were very few people who didn't appreciate them.

The Captain used to say that he had never tasted anything in the world like my wife's dripping cakes, and certainly he always gave us a proof that he was speaking the truth.

I didn't broach the subject I wanted to talk to the Captain about until after the tea had been cleared away and we had put our pipes on, and then I said :

‘Captain, what do you think has happened to this little household this very day?’

‘I'm sure I don't know,’ replied the Captain.

‘Guess!’

He guessed all manner of things—some that made my wife laugh heartily—but he never guessed right, so at last I told him.

‘Two thousand pounds!’ he exclaimed; ‘you lucky dog! Well, you have my best congratulations, and you too, ma'am. What are you going to do with it?’

‘Well, that’s just the difficulty I’m in. I can’t expect to get more than five per cent. by investing it, and that’s not quite two pounds a week, you know; but with a capital like that a man ought to be able to do something better. Now, if you had £2,000, Captain, what would you do with it?’

‘My dear fellow, if you really want to make your two thousand twenty, I can tell you the way. Your money has come just in the nick of time. You’ve heard me talk of the business I wanted to buy with Moss. I tell you frankly, good as it is, I should have had to let it go, for I couldn’t raise enough money; but as you are an old friend, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. If you like to go in with Moss and myself you shall be the senior partner.’

‘But I don’t know anything about business.’

‘That’s just the beauty of this concern. Moss and I can attend to the business details, and all you will have to do will be to sit at home and take half the profits; and they’ll be big, old fellow, they can’t help being big.’

‘But what sort of a business is it?’

‘Well, as we’ve got so far I’ll tell you. It is a patent agency.’

‘You mean an agency for bringing out patents—inventions?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, I don’t know much about patents, but I’ve always understood that patents were things people ruined themselves over. I knew a man once, an inventor. He thought he’d invented something that would enable people to fly in the air, and he spent every penny he had in the world on it, and died in a lunatic asylum through trying to fly out of a top-floor window into the kitchen garden, with a fan tied on to each of his arms as wings.’

The Captain laughed at my story.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘there are lots of madmen of that sort, and lots of fools who fancy they have invented something; but, on the contrary, there are hundreds of clever, ingenious men who do make real sensible, useful inventions, and for lack of capital are unable to complete and secure them. Now, our agency risks nothing. We buy patents and inventions from poor men—men without capital—and, of course, we only buy genuine things that are certain to be successes with capital to put them before the public. Why, at the present moment, I know a man who has a patent he will sell for £100, and with a little money spent on it in pushing it, it would be worth thousands. A patent

agency always pays—even out of the things that are worthless we get something, because we charge a fee for patenting.’

The Captain painted his scheme in such glowing colours, and explained how loss was impossible in any case, and how large the profits must be on some, that I said I would think it over seriously, and I did, and the next day he and I went to the City together, and met Mr. Moss, and then we had three bottles of champagne, and the end of it was they satisfied me completely, and I agreed to join them in a patent agency, and put my £2,000 into the business. The agreement was to be drawn up by a lawyer, and I was to be the senior partner, and not to be troubled to go to the office or have any worry, but to draw half the profits.

Of course, it took some little time to arrange matters, but eventually we got possession of the agency. It had been established some years, but the proprietor was old and had no capital, and we refurnished the offices, and at the end of six weeks, when I received my money, I handed it over to the Captain, who found £1,000 himself, and Moss found £1,000, and we started the business in which I was the senior partner. They didn’t trouble me about details, as I knew nothing of them, but the

Captain told me how things were getting on every evening when he came home. I had no uneasiness about my money after the first week, for business began to come in at once. Our first deal was a splendid one. We gave a poor fellow £20 for a new corkscrew, and sold the patent for £500, and another thing we bought for £50 the Captain told me a big wholesale City firm had offered him £1,000 for, but with our capital we ought to work it ourselves, and make five times that out of it. There was no doubt that I was in for a very good thing, for at the end of the first month the Captain brought the books to my house, and showed me that we had already made a clear profit of £500 over our working expenses, and had acquired patent rights that would in the course of time yield a considerable income. I was so satisfied with that that I didn't trouble much about details, and it being summer time, I followed the Captain's advice, and took apartments down at the seaside for the season, and went there with my wife, who was not very well, having taken a chill and fallen ill in consequence.

While I was away the Captain wrote me every week and told me how things were getting on. We were doing a steady, legitimate business in

the agency line alone, without taking any risk, and every now and then we were buying, for a small cash payment down, inventions which the poor fellows who had made them were unable to work themselves for want of capital. In one letter the Captain, who was in high spirits, told me that if we went on as we were going on then there must be at least £2,000 profits to divide among us at the end of the year, and that meant £1,000 for me to draw as my share. I felt that at last I was on the road to a fortune, and we altered our style of living, not being extravagant, of course, but spending more money, and we moved into better apartments on the front, and I began to negotiate for a larger house in town, and I and my wife determined that when we went back to London we would enjoy ourselves as we had never done before, and have a nice luxuriously furnished house and a big garden, with hothouses, and grow our own fruit, and all that sort of thing.

All this time we had left a woman in charge of our house at Highgate, and after we had been away about six weeks my wife began to be anxious, and asked me to go up to town and just see that everything was all right. So one day I went up by early train. I found everything right, and as I

had arranged not to go back till the last train, and had some hours to spare, I thought I would go to town and call at our office. It was on the second floor of a big house, but downstairs in the hall was a big brass plate, 'The Patent Agency,' and my name underneath, with 'Co.' at the end of it. The Captain and Mr. Moss had explained that 'Co.' looked better than having the three names, and that it was usual in a business of that sort.

I went upstairs feeling rather proud, but I was a little taken aback by seeing a notice pasted up on the office door, 'Back Directly.' I thought it rather odd that the place should be left like that in the afternoon, and wondered why the clerks had gone out as well as the Captain and Mr. Moss, and I thought it rather unbusinesslike. While I was staring at the notice the Captain came upstairs and started at seeing me there. He seemed rather taken aback, of course, not expecting me; but he eased my mind at once when he explained that he had had to put the notice up as we were so busy, that he and Mr. Moss had had to go out to see clients, and the clerks had also had to go out on business, and the office-boy was away with the measles. I wanted to go into the office and have a look round, but he took me by the arm and insisted



on my coming across to the hotel opposite and having a bottle of champagne, as he had a lot to tell me.

‘Hadn’t we better remain here,’ I said, ‘till somebody comes back?’

But he said he had left Moss at the bank a few minutes before, and he was coming on then, and the clerks would be back directly. So we went across to the hotel, and went into the smoking-room, and we stopped there talking till half-past five, when the office closed. The Captain had nothing but good news for me. Business was so good that he was engaging two more clerks, and a very big invention had just been brought to us which we were bringing out and working, and it was certain to sell all over the world, and we might make £20,000 out of it without risking the outlay of more than a few hundreds. In the course of conversation, I asked if I could not draw a little on account of the profit we had already made, as, having launched out a little, I was getting rather short of money, and my next rents were not due for a month. The Captain said that could easily be arranged, and that he would have the books made up, and pay whatever I wanted into my bank the following week. What did I want? I said about a hundred. ‘Have two!’ said the Captain;

'we can afford it, you know,' he added with a laugh, and I agreed, as I knew it would be useful for the purchases I intended to make when we returned to town.

He insisted on coming with me to the station, and so I caught an early train and got back home quite excited and happy, and I told my wife how splendidly things were going, and that I had drawn £200 on account of the profits already.

Poor little woman! She was quite jubilant, and we began to reckon up what we should do with the big income that was going to be ours. The only thing that worried me was her health. That cold seemed to have got hold of her, and she had a cough that shook her terribly, and caused her to have bad nights. As it didn't get better, I made up my mind a few days later that I would take her to a London physician, and we arranged to go up home for a few days in order that this might be done. I decided to go up early the next day and get everything ready for her, and she was to come up by an afternoon train.

When I got to our house and had seen that the rooms were all right and everything comfortable, I went out into the garden, and then for the first time I noticed that there was a lot of straw and

rubbish about in the Captain's front garden, and that the house looked untidy and queer.

I went indoors again, and asked the woman if the Captain had been having a lot of new furniture in, and she said, 'Lor, no, sir! he's moved. Everything was took away in a van nearly a week ago.'

That sent me backwards into a chair.

I couldn't understand why the Captain hadn't told me that he was moving when I was up in town—not only as his neighbour, but as his partner he ought to have told me. It wasn't the sort of thing that would slip his memory. 'Of course,' I said to myself, 'he's moved into a bigger house somewhere, but why did he keep it a secret from me?' I felt so worried about it that I determined to go straight off to the office and see him and ask him what he meant by it.

When I got to the office I found the door locked and no notice up. I rattled at the handle, but no one inside answered. Then I went downstairs on to a lower floor, where a surveyor had an office, and I went in and asked one of the clerks if he had seen Captain Brown lately. The clerk grinned. He evidently didn't know me, for he said, 'Oh, you're about the fiftieth that's wanted to know that.'

The place has been closed for nearly a week. The firm's gone, and nobody knows where, and there's no end of people been after them, and nice language on the staircase, I can tell you !'

I was dumfounded. Gone !—the firm gone ; the Captain and Moss gone ! What could it mean ? Hardly knowing what I did, I went straight to the bank where we kept our account, and introduced myself to the manager. He stared at me, and asked me into his private room.

'I'm glad you've called,' he said, 'because you can explain what your extraordinary conduct means.'

'Extraordinary conduct !' I gasped ; 'why, what have I done ?'

'Your firm drew out every shilling some days ago and closed the account. Since then we have had cheques given by it presented daily. It is a very serious matter.'

Suddenly I saw everything. I had simply been swindled. The Captain and Moss had bolted with all the money. I turned faint and staggered. The manager looked at me earnestly.

'Do you mean to tell me as the senior partner that you know nothing of this ?'

'Nothing, on my oath !' I exclaimed ; 'I never

interfered with the business. I only put £2,000 capital into it.'

'Well, you've been robbed,' said the manager; 'your precious partners have paid nobody, but have gone off with your capital and left no end of debts behind.'

My £2,000 had gone, and that was what I had to go home and tell my poor wife. I had been robbed of every shilling. I had never liked Moss, but the Captain—a Captain in the army!—I could scarcely believe it even then.

I didn't say anything to my wife that night, but she saw that I was worried, and I told her that we were likely to have a lawsuit with the business, and that had upset me. The next day I took her to the physician's, and he told me she would require the greatest care, as the lungs were affected, and I ought to take her to the South of France for the winter.

A few days before I should have thanked God that I had the money to do it; now my house of cards had come tumbling to the ground—not only was there no fortune coming, but my capital had been stolen. I understood the Captain's move now; I understood why I had been kept away. I tried to console myself with the idea that, after all, I was

only put back in the position I was before that two thousand came to me ; but, unfortunately, even that consolation was not left me.

The very next day I received a letter, and then lawyers' letters and writs began to pour in, and I went off to a solicitor, and found that I was liable for all the debts of the firm, and that everything I had in the world would have to go to the creditors, and that I should have to be a bankrupt.

I went to the authorities to try and find the Captain's address, but the only one they had was his old one at Highgate ; and as to his half-pay, they wouldn't even promise that when he applied for that his address should be given. It seems it is a rule not to do so.

I had to tell my wife then. Ah, it's years ago now, but I shall remember that day to the last hour of my life. We had been living in the clouds, and we had to come down with a crash to the dull earth. It broke her heart. A fortnight afterwards our home was sold up for the benefit of the creditors, and everything was swept away, and I was left penniless with a sick wife. I got a berth, through some friends who had known my father, in a business office, and earned thirty shillings a week, but the wife never held up her head again. Before the

year was out she was dead, and I was left alone. Soon afterwards I had an attack of rheumatic fever, and went into the hospital, and came out with my hands in such a condition that I was no longer able to write.

I was homeless and penniless, and the day I was discharged from the hospital I went down to the river and thought of throwing myself in. But I hadn't the courage or the cowardice, whichever you like to call it, and I went round to an old friend's and he lent me five shillings, and was very kind to me, and took my case up, knowing how terribly I had been wronged. And one day when he had got a little money together he came to me in the room he had taken for me, and told me of a bath-chairman who had a fairly good connection, and was giving up on account of his age, and although I hesitated at first, at last I agreed that, after all, it was the best thing I could do, and we bought the bath-chair, and I've been on the stand ever since.

I do fairly well at times, badly at others, but I keep a roof over my head, and am no longer dependent on charity. My mates, when they heard of my story, called me the Senior Partner, and I suppose the name will stick to me.

The Captain! Oh, I've never seen anything of him, but I heard that he and Moss got away together with the money, and set up a betting office in Paris under false names, and did well until the French police came down upon them for something, and then they cleared out and went to some gambling place—Monte Carlo, I think—and lost everything. Moss, I was told afterwards, was the Captain's evil genius, and had got him into financial difficulties long before I made his acquaintance at Highgate. Why a man who had held her Majesty's commission should turn swindler I don't know, but it happens sometimes. Oh yes, I am perfectly certain that they meant to swindle me when they made me the senior partner.

Thank you, sir; shall I call for orders to-morrow? About eleven. Hope you'll soon feel stronger. If ever you want to send for me off the stand, tell your servant to ask for the Senior Partner.



## VIII.

### *A FAMILY GATHERING.*

It was a long, quiet suburban road, and almost deserted, for it was a pouring wet night and past ten o'clock. A solitary policeman, his wet cape glistening in the light of the lamp by which he stood for a moment, gazed sadly about him, and wiped the heavy rain from his beard.

It was a dismal, depressing night, with a melancholy wind blowing in fitful gusts through the dark, dripping trees in the little front gardens of the damp stucco villas.

In many of the houses scarcely a gleam of light was to be seen through the drawn venetian blinds. A four-wheeled cab came lumbering up the muddy road, and deposited an elderly gentleman at one of the houses. The elderly gentleman got out and paid the cabman, and told him if he liked to go and

wait at the public-house which was right at the top of the road, he could get himself a drink, and there would be a job for him in an hour or so. The cabman said, 'All right, guv'nor,' and drove off, and the old gentleman knocked at the door, and after a little delay was admitted. The policeman, having nothing better to do, watched the old gentleman waiting on the doorstep, and thought that if he were the master of the house he should say something to the servant who kept him waiting so long on such a night. And, watching, he noticed that the door was presently opened cautiously, with the chain up, and that a man's face peered out into the night, and the eyes in the face seemed to scan the old gentleman rather anxiously.

The lamp under which the policeman was standing threw what light it had to spare right on that front-door, and that was how it was, perhaps, that the policeman noticed things. He couldn't see much of anything else, and there was nothing else to look at.

The scrutiny was evidently satisfactory, for presently the chain was removed, the door was opened, and the old gentleman went in.

The policeman looked up at the sky, thought it

looked lighter, muttered to himself that it was a beast of a night, and resumed his melancholy saunter along the lonely suburban road, and beginning to think over a little domestic matter which was troubling him at home, the old gentleman passed out of his mind.

In the little dining-room of that house a small family party were gathered together. Some of them had evidently not long arrived, for they sat there with their overcoats and bonnets on, and one of them, a man about five-and-thirty, had his wet umbrella still in his hand.

It was not a merry family party at all. Some of the women had been crying, and the faces of the men were very solemn. In an easy-chair by the fireplace sat a gray-haired old lady, her hands clasped in front of her, her eyelids swollen and half closed with crying, her right foot drumming almost hysterically on the fender rail.

When the old gentleman came in nobody spoke for a moment, only every eye was turned towards him, and there was a look of anxious inquiry in every face.

A young lady of about eight-and-twenty was the first to speak. Her face was pale and haggard, and she spoke with an effort.

‘Well,’ she said, almost in a whisper, ‘must he go?’

‘Yes, and at once!’

The young lady bent her head and gave a stifled sob. The old gray-haired lady rose and tottered across to her, and almost fell into an empty chair beside her. Then she drew the younger woman towards her until the fair, wavy hair fell upon her shoulder.

‘We must comfort each other,’ she said. ‘God will give us the strength to bear our sorrow.’ Then her own eyes filled with tears, and the two women sobbed together.

‘Does he know?’ said one of the younger men, in a choky voice.

‘No,’ said the old gentleman; ‘I haven’t been to tell him yet. Where is he?’

‘With the child. He asked to be left alone with her for a little while.’

‘Who will tell him?’

‘I will,’ said the young lady. ‘I—I’d rather, if you don’t mind.’

She rose to go, and the men stood up and made way for her to pass them, and one of them took her hand and pressed it. ‘Be brave, dear,’ he whispered; ‘think of the little one.’

She bowed her head and passed out, and the door closed behind her.

She was a young wife ; and she had gone to tell her husband that they must part—that he must go far, far away ; steal away secretly, like a thief in the night, and be seen no more.

The old gray-haired lady was this man's mother ; the solemn men and the weeping women were the wife's brothers and sisters, and her sisters' husbands.

A week ago there had been no thought among them of such a scene as this. A week ago Roy Ellerton left his charming home at Richmond to go to the City, where his business lay. He kissed his wife and his little girl at the door, waved his hand to them as he went down the gravel path, and went on his way with a smiling face.

That afternoon his wife received a telegram to say that her husband had gone to see his mother, who was not well, and would not be back that night. The next morning Mrs. Ellerton's eldest brother called at the villa. She was astonished to see him so early, but no thought of anything dreadful flashed across her mind. When they were alone and the door was closed, he looked up with a pained expression in his face, and said, ' Nellie dear, I

have to tell you something. You must be a brave little woman.' The young wife rose to her feet.

'Jack!' she cried, 'it's—it's about Roy; he's ill—injured!'

'Yes, it's about Roy, but he's not ill; he's—child, child, you must bear up—it mayn't be really serious after all, but—but—he—he has been arrested!'

'Arrested! Roy! Jack, tell me what for!'

'Well, it's rather a complicated affair, and I—I think he's innocent, but he was arrested yesterday afternoon at the office. His solicitor saw him, and I went to see him last evening. He's bearing up, and says he can explain everything, but you were bound to know, and I thought I'd better come and tell you.'

'And Roy is in prison!'

'Yes. You see, of course, it was too late to do anything yesterday, but he'll be brought up to-day, and I expect they'll take bail. You—you'd better not read the papers for a day or two, dear. It will only upset you.'

'My God!' cried the girl, 'it will be in all the papers, then—that Roy—that my husband has been arrested. Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!'

For a moment the shame of it was the one thing

that came to the unhappy wife's mind ; then she dashed the tears away, and said, ' Jack, let me go to him—take me to him.'

'No, no, dear,' said her brother kindly ; ' you'd better not go, it would upset him terribly. I hope—I believe that he will come back home to-night.'

Roy Ellerton did return that night. Only sufficient evidence for a remand was tendered to the prosecution, and as two well-known City men, friends of his father's, had offered themselves as sureties for his reappearance, they were accepted without the usual twenty-four hours' notice to the police.

The interview between the husband and wife that night was a painful one. The whole thing had come like a thunderbolt from a blue sky upon Nellie Ellerton. She had believed that her husband was all that was good and honourable, that he was doing well in the City as a commission-agent, for she knew that he represented several first-class firms, and there had never been any question of money difficulties. She was a careful housewife, but they lived exceedingly well, and all that she wanted she had. The tradespeople were paid with the utmost regularity, and nobody's credit was better than theirs.

Roy Ellerton did not tell the whole truth to his wife. He said that it was a question of accounts, and that he undoubtedly owed a large sum of money to one of the firms, according to their statement, but not according to his. However, after consultation with his solicitor and his friends, he had agreed that it would be better to raise the sum claimed. His friends were working for him—they would see the prosecutors in the morning, and he was sure that all would be arranged.

But in his heart of hearts he didn't believe it, and he knew that if this charge were disposed of, others would speedily follow. The firms for whom he acted would become alarmed, and there would be close investigation, and he knew what the result of that would be.

To his solicitor the next day he made a clean breast of everything. Further disguise was useless. For the last year he had been gambling, speculating on the Stock Exchange, trying to redeem a first heavy loss, which had swept away his own little capital. Then good money had been flung after the bad, and unfortunately the good money was not his own. It was money which he had received on behalf of the firms.

The case against him was undoubtedly com-



plicated because he had paid after a long delay in several instances. Money he received in June for one firm he had paid over to another firm on whose behalf he had received money in January. He had a banking account, and had paid all cheques into it, giving his own cheque when a settlement of outstanding claims became absolutely necessary.

Technically, however, in the first instance he had committed a fraud. Nothing could make it a question of an unsettled debt, and his solicitor assured him that even if this case were settled out of court by inducing the prosecutors to withdraw, other charges against him would undoubtedly follow swiftly.

There was only one thing to be done. Roy Ellerton, if he wished to escape a long term of imprisonment, must go—must abscond from his bail. It was not a particularly heavy amount, and his friends would not mind paying it; but it was a desperate thing to do.

It was on a Tuesday night that the unhappy man arrived home. He was to appear again before the magistrate on the following Tuesday.

It was on Thursday evening that the family gathering took place in the quiet villa in that lonely suburban road.

It was the home of Roy Ellerton's widowed mother, and here he came for the last rendezvous after long and anxious consultation.

Up to Thursday night there had still been a ray of hope that matters might be arranged. If the prosecutors had withdrawn from the case, it would have given Roy time to go about and raise the money, perhaps to settle with the other firms whose money he had used. But all attempts at negotiation had failed, and the inevitable had to be faced.

As soon as the old gentleman who had been the last arrival had said that there was no hope, Nellie Ellerton went to her husband. She found him sitting by their little daughter's bedside. The child had fallen asleep holding her father's hand, and he sat there beside her, his head bowed low in an agony of grief.

When his wife entered the room, there was no need for her to say a word. He read his doom in her white face and streaming eyes.

She had come to bid him good-bye.

\* \* \* \* \*

At eleven o'clock that night the old gentleman went quietly out in search of the cab, and found it at the public-house. He came back with it, and

went into the house, and the cabman followed and brought out two heavy boxes and some small luggage. All had been packed in readiness. The parting between husband and wife had already taken place, and the poor girl had remained with the old mother by the bedside of the child.

One by one the members of that heart-broken family rose and bade Roy Ellerton farewell. They knew what that farewell meant. He was going from his home, from his kindred, from his native land, from everything that made life worth having, for ever. There could be no return.

There was not a dry eye in that little room that night. His friends took the wretched man's hand, and gripped it for the last time. Their resentment at his shameful act had vanished—all they felt then was a great heart-sorrow for his fate.

He bore himself as bravely as he could, but it was a terrible ordeal. Presently the last good-bye had been said, he stepped into the cab with the old gentleman, who had previously given the cabman his instructions, the lumbering, ramshackle old vehicle moved slowly forward, and was presently lost in the night.

And then the visitors went out in couples and went back to their homes.

The lights went out one by one in the little house, and presently all was darkness, and the silence was only broken now and then by the sobs of two women—the mother and the wife—who sat the long night through holding each other's hands by the bedside of the sleeping child.

\* \* \* \* \*

A bright sun is shining in at the windows of the little villa in the suburban road. Two years have gone by since Roy Ellerton went away. His case is almost forgotten now—the secret of his whereabouts is only known to his wife and one or two of his relatives. From time to time letters have been received from him, but in a roundabout way. No letters come direct to the villa. They go to the house of an old servant in the country, who puts them into a fresh envelope and re-addresses them to the wife. At first the letters were hopeful—Roy, who, under an assumed name, had safely reached a South American town, where he was comparatively safe, had a certain amount of money with him; enough to enable him to go on with for a time until he could get employment, and that, he wrote, he was sure to find by-and-by, as a business-like Englishman had always a good chance. But after a time his letters grew despondent. He had

been ill, and his illness had been an expensive one. He had had to travel further afield into a wilder part. Going one day into a mercantile office to offer himself for a clerkship which was vacant, he had recognised among the employés a young Englishman who had been a neighbour at Richmond. This had terrified him.

The fear of capture was always before his eyes. He saw himself betrayed to the authorities, captured, and taken back to England, and brought up at the police court as an absconding criminal. From time to time English detectives visited the town, generally in search of big prey, it is true, but they might hear of his presence there and track him down also.

He did not dwell on these things in his letters to his wife, but it was evident to her that he was beginning to lose hope.

At last he began to write for money. His wife had a modest little income of her own, just sufficient to live in apartments and keep herself and the little one decently, but none to spare to send to her husband. So she sold a few little things that she valued—the jewellery that her husband had given her, and one or two of her wedding presents—and sent him what they realized.

He acknowledged the receipt of the money, and wrote more hopefully. The place he was in was a much safer one for him ; it was a bit wild and lawless, but there was a chance of making money in different ways now and then, and if he could only get a little capital, ever so little, to trade with, he might gradually get into smooth water and be able to send money home.

Then he wrote that he was ill again ; he had a touch of fever, and it had taken all the energy out of him and left him weak. The life he was leading was so hard and rough and lonely. But now he had been in the place some time he had got to know it, and he was certain that with capital, say five or six hundred pounds, he could trade and make money rapidly.

It was on receipt of this letter that Nellie went to see old Mrs. Ellerton. Could nothing be done for Roy ? The old mother was in despair. She, too, had had letters from her son asking for money, and had sent what she could. But she had said nothing to Nellie. Her son had begged her not to, as it might make his wife uneasy, and the wife on her part, obedient to her husband's instructions, had said nothing to anyone. She had been urged by her family under no circumstances to send out

money. They did not think quite so highly of her husband as she did.

But this last letter she determined to show the mother. After all, there could be no harm in it. One must have a little capital to do business, and it was most important that Roy should earn something if he could get a situation of any kind. And situations such as he was fitted to fill are hard to get unless a man has at least someone who can speak to his character. What reference could Roy make to anyone? He was living under an assumed name, and he was hiding from justice.

The two women talked the matter over. The old lady had the interest of a certain sum which her husband, Roy's father, had left her. She could live on a little less, and sell some of her securities. Yes, she would sell sufficient to realize £500, and Roy should have it. He would pay her back directly he began to make money.

Happy to think that Roy was at last to have a chance, Nellie thought that the time had come when she might carry out the idea that had never been absent from her mind. She would take her child and go out to Roy, and make her home with him. Her little income would be a great help, and

her womanly love and sympathy would make all the difference in the world to his life.

The old mother, forgetting everything but her son, thought that the wife was right, and her place was by her husband's side. But when Nellie's brothers and sisters heard of it they were indignant. She had no right to go out with her little girl to such a place. She must think of herself and the child, and neither of them was strong enough to endure the hardships which both might have to suffer in a wild, lawless place such as her husband had described.

But Nellie Ellerton was firm. She had made up her mind to go, now the opportunity had come. She would take the money out to Roy and help him to make a fresh start in life. When they found they could not turn her, that all their entreaties were in vain so far as she herself was concerned, her friends urged her at least to leave the child with them. But she refused. No, she would make her husband's exile as happy as she could. His wife and child should share it with him.

A week later she wrote to her husband, bade him be of good cheer, and told him that she was coming out to him. One of her brothers had



ascertained all particulars for her at the steamship office, and her passage had been secured. In three weeks she was to sail.

It was not until the time drew near for her departure that she began to realize the task she had undertaken. She remembered that there was a long journey into a wild part of the country after she had reached port, and she had never travelled far alone in her life. But she was a brave little woman, and she did not let that idea worry her long, but another which suddenly occurred to her made her almost sick with fear.

Suppose there was still a chance, then they would arrest her husband and bring him back. Suppose the police were to find out she was sailing for South America, would they not instantly feel sure that she was going to her husband, and take means to have her followed on the other side? Might she not actually guide the feet of justice to her husband's hiding-place?

She told her brother of her fears, and he reassured her. The only caution really necessary was in leaving home and getting on board the vessel. He had taken the tickets, not in her own name, but in the name which her husband had assumed.

The leave-taking was an unutterably sad one. Her dear ones gathered round her and tried to cheer her, but their faces belied their words. They felt that they were parting with her for ever.

One does not care to dwell on such a scene as this last parting was. It is one which is acted day after day in the great drama of life, but its inexpressible sadness only comes home to those who play the parts.

And its sadness was increased by the fact that the young wife, instead of going away bravely to her absent husband, went with terror in her heart, trembling lest by any act of hers she should imperil his safety. She went away to a distant town first, and from that town travelled back to Southampton, and went on board the ship. No one came to see her off. She feared even that, and so when the great ship sailed out to sea and the passengers waved their last farewell to friends on shore, the poor little woman stood with her child alone and unnoticed, and with a great chill in her heart looked her last upon the land where all her life had been spent, where all her dear ones were whose faces she would see no more.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a great fête day in a small town in one of the

South American republics. A hot sun is blazing down upon the crowds of holiday folks that fill the streets. At a table in front of a low café sits an Englishman, his hand trembling as he raises his glass to his lips, his eyes bloodshot, his cheeks pale and sunken.

A dark, Spanish-looking girl puts her hand out kindly, and takes the glass from him.

‘Come, Dick, you’ve had enough of that stuff. You can’t drink it in this climate, you know.’

She speaks English with only the slightest accent. Her mother was a South American, but her father was an English workman at one of the factories in the town. One or two men as they pass have nodded to her. Juana Lopez has been known in the little town from a child, and she has a history. It was she who shot the man who left her for another. But she has consoled herself, so the gossips say, as they shrug their shoulders. She has taken up with this Englishman—this Dick Eaton, of whom nobody knows anything except that he gambles and drinks, and is supposed to live on money which he gets from England. He was ill in her mother’s house, where he lodged for a time, and she was kind to him, and took pity on him, and now—well, they are living together; she

has left her mother's home with him, and they have their own rooms in another part of the town.

‘All right,’ says the Englishman, as he empties the glass before he puts it down; ‘it won’t do me any harm. I’m a bit down to-day.’

‘You always are “down” as you call it. Now, Dick, why can’t you try and be happy? Don’t I do all I can to make you?’

‘You’re a devilish good little girl, but I get thinking sometimes. That’s why I take more of this stuff than is good for me. Since I had that infernal fever I don’t seem able to shake the blue devils off nearly as easily as I could once.’

‘Well, let’s go home till the sun’s off the streets. It isn’t good for you to be out in the heat of the day, you know.’

‘All right, come along, then; but we’ll call at the post-office first. I’m expecting a letter from England, and there’ll be money in it, I hope.’

‘It is no good; to-day the post-office is shut. It is a fête-day.’

‘Confound it! so it is. I’m a bit worried about this letter. I ought to have had it a month ago. It’s odd that it hasn’t come. With or without the money I’m sure my——’

He stopped suddenly and checked the word that

was on his lips, and then stammered, 'My—my people would reply if they didn't send the coin.'

'Dick, if you get enough money, some day you will go back to England and leave me.'

The man looked down quickly at the girl.

'No, my dear,' he said, 'you needn't be frightened of that. I'm never likely to go back to England.'

They walked on quietly together, he taking her arm, for he was still weak, and presently they reached the house where they lived and went in. Their room was on the ground-floor, and the window opened on to the street. It was wide open this morning, for the sun was not on that part of the house and you could see into the room from the street.

Dick Eaton flung himself into a big American rocking-chair.

'I'm beastly tired,' he said, 'I don't seem to get my strength at all.'

He lay back and closed his eyes, and presently he fell asleep.

Juana drew her chair close up to his and put her arm about his neck, and presently his head drooped down and rested on her shoulder. And as it did

so she stooped down and kissed him and said something in Spanish, and her big black eyes were lustrous with love.

And at that moment down the street came an English lady holding a little girl by the hand, and with them was a Spaniard, a waiter from the European hotel, who spoke a little English and had offered to be their guide.

‘This is the street, madam,’ he said, ‘and yonder is the house for which you have asked.’

The lady thanked him, the guide raised his hat and went on his way. Slowly down the street came the English lady, and paused at the open window. She was looking at the ground, wondering what her husband would say—trying to summon up courage for the meeting. But her child, looking about her at everything, had seen into the room.

She gave one little start, and then cried aloud :

‘Papa ! there is papa !’

Nellie Ellerton ran forward to the window. Then, reeling back, she gave a low cry of agony and fell to the ground.

Juana, startled at the cry, sprang up and rushed out. She lifted the woman gently up and brought her into the room still senseless.

‘It is the heat,’ she said, as she put her gently

on the sofa. 'Dick! Dick! here is a lady fainted in the street. Get me a glass of water.'

Dick Eaton awoke and started up. His wife in a dead swoon lay in the arms of his mistress, and his child, terrified, was kneeling by her mother sobbing.

And in the one wild word he uttered Juana learnt the truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the little post-office on the following day an Englishman entered and asked if there were any letters for him. His name was a peculiar one, and the clerk handed him all the letters from England waiting to be called for, that he might look through them himself. There were about a dozen. He looked through them, and suddenly he paused and read the name on one of the envelopes. 'Roy Ellerton!' he said; 'why, dash it all, that's the name of the man who absconded from his bail two years ago. So he's here, is he! What a fool to have letters in his own name! But perhaps it isn't the same.' He put the letter down and went on through the remainder till he found one for himself, which he took, and then went out of the office.

Nellie Ellerton in a moment of forgetfulness had

written to her husband in his own name instead of his assumed name of Richard Eaton, and so, although he had gone day after day to the post-office, he had not received the letter, and was in utter ignorance of his wife's intended visit.

\* \* \* \* \*

A long, quiet suburban road, with autumn leaves strewing the ground. Slowly there comes along it a dark, Spanish-looking woman holding a fair-haired English child by the hand. The woman glances right and left at the numbers, and at last identifies the little villa of which she is in search.

She knocks at the door and is admitted, and presently the child is clasped to the breast of a gray-haired old lady, who with streaming eyes listens to the Spanish girl's tale.

Nellie Ellerton is dead ; she died soon after her arrival in the South American town, watched and tended to the last by this woman. Roy Ellerton died by his own hand on the day that his wife crossed the threshold of his new home, and the Spanish girl, learning everything from the dying wife, brought the little one back to its home in England.



She tells as much of the fate of Roy Ellerton and his wife as she dares. The rest is a secret she will carry to the grave. There is grief for evermore in this quiet little English home. She will not add to it by telling the whole ghastly truth.

## IX.

### *MISS MONTRESSOR.*

THE Darley diamonds were famous. They had been in the Darley family for several generations. When old Lady Darley died they passed to her only son, Lord Darley, and disappeared from view, as he remained, in spite of the frantic efforts of Belgravian mothers to find him a wife, a confirmed bachelor. Lord Darley was five-and-thirty at the time of his mother's death, and though an ardent sportsman, fond of the turf, and a familiar figure in club life, he was generally credited with being something of a woman-hater.

Soon after his mother's death, he announced his intention of going to South Africa on a hunting expedition, and a month later quietly took his departure. His arrival at Port Elizabeth was duly chronicled, and then nothing more was heard of him, and he had almost entirely dropped out of

men's minds, when, two years later, society was suddenly startled by the appearance of a new burlesque actress at a West End theatre, who, in the last act of a wonderful variety entertainment, came on blazing with the famous Darley diamonds.

There was absolutely no mistake about them. They were too well known not to be recognised. Lady Balham, who knew everybody and everything, was the first to discover them, and she turned to her husband and said, 'My dear, look, those are the Darley diamonds!' and Lord Balham, directed by his spouse, inspected the gems which adorned the young lady long and carefully, and agreed with her. She pointed out to him in particular a pendant which was famous, and in the centre of which was the famous severed hand of the Darley crest.

'How on earth did she get them?' exclaimed Lady Balham; and as soon as the story went round, and society had looked to see for itself, that question was repeated by everyone. The manager of the theatre was appealed to on the subject. Who was Miss Montessor, and where did she come from?

The manager knew nothing, except that she had come from America, where she had been playing

for some few months with considerable success, mainly on account of her diamonds, and she had applied to him for an engagement in London, and as there was a big show part in the last act of the piece, he had given it to her after seeing the diamonds which she proposed to wear.

When he was told that these were the famous Darley diamonds, the property of Lord Darley, who had disappeared in South Africa, or who, at any rate, had not for nearly two years communicated with any of his friends, the manager said he would see Miss Montressor, and ‘pump’ her, and so, after the performance was over, he sent round and asked if she would come into his room for a moment.

It was rather a delicate matter. He couldn’t very well say to the young lady, ‘Where did you get these diamonds?’ It is not usual, and it would not be considered good taste to ask young ladies on the stage who gave them their jewellery. So he approached the subject in a roundabout way.

‘Your diamonds have made a great sensation, my dear,’ he said.

‘Oh yes, they always do,’ replied Miss Montressor with a smile.

She was a fine tall girl, almost a brunette, with

glorious eyes, and a set of beautiful white teeth which she showed every time she spoke.

‘Then, you’ve had them some time?’

‘No; I wore them for the first time in New York in the revival of “The Black Crook,” at the beginning of this year.’

‘You mean on the stage?’

‘Yes.’

‘But you had them before?’

Miss Montessor looked up with a roguish look in her eyes, and smiled, and showed her white teeth.

‘You want to know who gave them to me, I guess.’

The manager protested. They were such magnificent diamonds, and everyone was talking about them—that was all. And—er—several people had told him that there was only one set in England like them—the famous Darley diamonds.

The manager watched Miss Montessor closely as he delivered that home-thrust, but it appeared to have no effect upon the young lady.

‘Oh, they’re like somebody else’s, are they?’ she said. ‘Who is Darley? Is she on the stage?’

The remark was made with such apparent innocence that the manager made up his mind that

Miss Montressor knew nothing of Lord Darley, and was ignorant of the fact that she was wearing jewels which had been in the Darley family for goodness knows how many years.

He hesitated a moment before he replied.

‘Darley, my child, is not on the stage at all,’ he said presently. ‘These diamonds resemble those of the Darley family; the present owner of them—the—er—the ones that are like yours, is Lord Darley.’

‘Oh, that’s odd! What does a man want with diamonds? He doesn’t wear them, does he?’ exclaimed Miss Montressor, with a little giggle.

‘No; but he owns them, and I suppose if he ever marries he will give them to his wife.’

‘I see. Odd that they should be so like mine, isn’t it?’

‘Very—in fact, it’s a thing people here cannot understand. The—the severed hand is the Darley crest.’

Miss Montressor suddenly ceased to show her white teeth, and her face became serious.

‘The Darley crest!’ she said. ‘Then, I suppose people think my diamonds are the Darley diamonds?’

‘Well, to speak plainly, my dear, they do,’ re-

plied the manager; 'but, of course, as you never met Lord Darley, and he didn't give them to you, and his diamonds are probably still at his bankers' in London—why, of course, it's a very odd coincidence, and that's all.'

'Thank you very much for telling me this,' said Miss Montessor, rising to go. 'It is better that I should know it. Good-evening.' She gave the manager a dignified bow, and went out of the room.

'It's odd, deuced odd!' said the manager to himself, as he lighted a cigar and sat back meditatively in his armchair. 'There's not the slightest doubt that they are the Darley diamonds, but how the deuce did she get them?'

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Montessor drove home to her house in Fulham, not at all easy in her mind. Her maid, who accompanied her, and assisted her to guard the case in which the famous jewels were nightly packed, spoke to her several times, but received no answer. Miss Montessor was absorbed in thought.

Directly she got home she went to her boudoir, and opening her escritoire, took from it a small bundle of letters. She took out an envelope in

which there was a photograph. She looked at the photograph long and earnestly. It was that of a tall, handsome-looking man, with curly hair and a clean-shaven face — a man of about five-and-thirty.

‘He couldn’t have been Lord Darley,’ she said; ‘and yet if he wasn’t, how did he come by those diamonds? Perhaps he was Lord Darley, and if he was—well, he wouldn’t have given me diamonds which he must have known would be recognised sooner or later. Poor Jack! I wonder what’s become of him—if I shall ever hear or see him again? Lord Darley is away in South Africa, they say. I must find somebody who knew him, and find out if this is his photograph or not.’

Then she went downstairs to the dining-room and had her supper, and sat late into the night thinking. She wondered whether she ought to wear the diamonds again under the circumstances, but if she didn’t the manager would probably object. She had been engaged for her diamonds, not for her talent, and though she was a handsome woman, there were plenty of handsome women about who would have filled her part for very much less salary than she was taking.

She was worried. The circumstances under



which she had received those diamonds were peculiar, and she had lost sight of the donor in a very mysterious way. She had met him first in America, when she was only a chorus-girl in a variety company. He had sent her flowers to the stage-door, and had soon afterwards been introduced to her at one of those Bohemian gatherings where millionaires and professionals meet on equal terms.

He had not disguised his admiration for her, and he had made her a temporary offer of his heart instead of a permanent offer of his hand. Such arrangements not being outside the code of morality in a certain section of Bohemian society, Maggie Montessor (her real name was Clafferton, and she was the daughter of a New England farmer), had accepted it, and had suddenly burst out into beautiful clothes and precious stones and a carriage, and an elegant suite of rooms in one of the best parts of New York.

Mr. Dalmain was, it was understood, a rich Englishman, who had made a colossal fortune in Peru. That was current gossip, but nobody seemed to know anything very definite about him. It was after they had lived together for two months that one day Mr. Dalmain—Jack, as Miss Montessor

called him — suddenly produced the wonderful diamonds.

‘Look here, little woman,’ he said, ‘as long as we’re together you can wear these, but on one condition.’

‘What is that?’

‘That if we ever part you give them back to me. You must give me a little note to say they are only lent to you. I can’t give them to you for—well, for family reasons.’

Maggie had accepted the beautiful diamonds gladly on these terms, and had worn them on the stage for the first time in the revival of the ‘Black Crook,’ and had driven half the ladies of New York mad with envy. As to the girls in the company, they were simply stupefied at Miss Montressor’s good fortune, and they agreed among themselves that Jack Dalmain was either a new Monte Cristo or a prince in disguise.

Jack Dalmain was a good fellow, and Maggie Montressor was really very much in love with him and very fond of him, and so when one night on reaching home after the performance she found a little note from him, saying that he had suddenly been called away on a journey connected with important business, that he hoped to be back in a

few days, and if he wasn't, he would write to her and let her know when to expect him, she was very much upset. From the day that Jack Dalmain had left her she had never heard of him again, and so, when at the end of six months, having exhausted all the money he had banked on her behalf, and sold some of her presents, she found herself getting hard up as well as ill from anxiety about the mysterious action of her lover, she determined to take a trip to Europe and, if possible, get an engagement for a time in London. She couldn't sell the diamonds, because they were not hers to sell, and she would sooner have starved than parted with them after her promise to Jack.

She brought her diamonds with her, got the engagement in London, and now she had been brought face to face with the fact that the wonderful jewels Jack Dalmain had given her were well known in London as the property of Lord Darley.

Was Jack Dalmain Lord Darley? That was the question which was worrying Maggie Montessor, and if he was, why had he never written and never claimed those family jewels from her?

Maggie Montessor passed a sleepless night, and lay late the following morning—late even for a professional lady—and it was past noon when she

came downstairs dressed to go out for a walk. She was pale, and felt ill and in need of the fresh air and the sunshine.

Just as she was about to start the servant entered with a card. A gentleman wished to see her on important business. Maggie glanced at the card, and saw that the visitor was a Mr. Oldfield, a solicitor. She told the servant she would see the gentleman, and a minute afterwards she went into the drawing-room to him.

Mr. Oldfield was an elderly gentleman, with 'old family solicitor' written on every feature and on every article of his attire. He greeted Miss Montressor with old-fashioned courtesy, and then, without any preamble, proceeded to explain his business.

'You must excuse my calling upon you, Miss Montressor,' he said; 'but I am Lord Darley's solicitor.'

Miss Montressor gave a little start. Was the explanation of the mystery coming at last?

'I have called upon you in consequence of my having just heard, through a client of mine, Lord Balham, that you have in your possession a set of diamonds which bear an extraordinary resemblance to the family diamonds of my client.'

‘Yes,’ said Miss Montessor, ‘I have the diamonds; but I was told last night, for the first time, that they resembled others which were well known.’

‘Under these circumstances, my dear young lady, you will not, I am sure, mind my asking you for a little explanation.’

‘Certainly not; but first of all let me ask you one question. If Lord Darley has his diamonds, why need he trouble about mine?’

‘Exactly; but we don’t know where Lord Darley is or what he has done with his diamonds.’

‘You don’t know where Lord Darley is?’

‘No; he went to South Africa two years ago, and in spite of every effort on our part to get information concerning him, we could learn nothing beyond the fact that he arrived at Port Elizabeth safely.’

‘Then he has never written home?’

‘Not once.’

‘And his diamonds—they were not left with anyone?’

‘I have told you we can find no trace of them. His mother, old Lady Darley, kept them in the house, we know. At her death Lord Darley naturally took possession of everything. When he

went away he left everything in charge of responsible people, and he took certain things to his bank, but the jewels are not there, and there is no trace of them in the house. The jewels and Lord Darley have disappeared together. Now you understand why I am going to ask you to be candid with me, and to tell me where you obtained the diamonds you wear nightly on the stage, and which—pardon me—I am sure are the original Darley diamonds.’

Miss Montressor hesitated a moment, then she went upstairs and fetched the photograph of Jack Dalmain.

‘Will you tell me,’ she said, as she handed the photograph to the solicitor, ‘if this is a photograph of Lord Darley?’

‘Certainly not,’ said the solicitor; ‘it does not bear the slightest resemblance to him.’

Maggie took the photograph back.

‘Why did you show me this photograph?’ said the solicitor.

‘Because that is the person who, in New York a year ago, lent me the diamonds I wear.’

‘*Lent* you!’

‘Yes; it was understood that I was to return them to him when he asked me.’

‘And he did not ask you.’

‘No; at least, that is, he went away without doing so, and I have never heard from him since.’

‘Went away—do you mean he bade you good-bye?’

Maggie felt that for her own sake it was better to conceal nothing, and so she told Mr. Oldfield the whole story of her connection with Jack Dalmain, and his mysterious disappearance.

Mr. Oldfield looked puzzled.

‘It is all very mysterious,’ he said. ‘Lord Darley disappears, this gentleman disappears, and in some extraordinary way Mr. Dalmain at the time of his disappearance was practically the possessor of the Darley diamonds. I must confess that I cannot understand the affair at all.’

‘And the diamonds,’ said Maggie; ‘do you intend to dispute my possession of them?’

‘Well,’ said the solicitor hesitatingly, ‘I really can’t say definitely at present. I have only just taken the matter up. I am obliged to you for your information; you have been most frank and candid, and—er—so far as I can see, I—er—don’t exactly know how we are going to dispute your claim to them.’

‘I would give them up to Mr. Dalmain, but I

certainly should not feel justified in giving them up to anyone else.'

'My dear young lady, on that point, if it should arise, you would, of course, consult your own solicitor. I represent the—er—other side. Thank you again. You will probably hear further from me. Good-morning.'

Mr. Oldfield shook hands cordially with Miss Montressor, and took his departure.

And Maggie, more puzzled than ever, wondered what on earth could be the connection between her former lover and Lord Darley. Jack Dalmain, she knew now, was not the missing English peer who, according to Mr. Oldfield, was the rightful owner of the gems she was nightly wearing. She was convinced herself that they were the Darley diamonds, and the affair so worried her that but for her promise to Jack, who might after all return some day and claim them, she would have given them up.

She wore them at the theatre that night and the following night, and they attracted more attention than ever. The story had got about.

Mysterious paragraphs were beginning to appear in the society journals. The moment she came on the stage every opera-glass was levelled at her.



Miss Montessor had ten lines to speak, but she was the attraction of the great Up-to-Date Burlesque at the Merriment Theatre.

But she did not wear the diamonds long afterwards.

One night when she reached home, the servant who opened the door informed her that a gentleman had called and had left a note for her.

She opened it and read it, and it dropped from her hand.

‘I will come again at one o’clock. Send your servants to bed—open the door yourself and let me in. I only want to see you for a minute.

‘JACK.’

It was Jack Dalmain come back again as mysteriously as he had disappeared.

At one o’clock, having obeyed his instructions, Maggie opened the door. Jack Dalmain, who was waiting opposite the house, crossed the road and stepped in.

Maggie, after a hurried word of greeting, led the way to the dining-room.

‘What does it all mean, Jack? What does it all mean?’

‘I can’t explain now, Maggie,’ Jack answered, ‘but I’ve come for you to redeem your promise.’

‘The diamonds!’

‘Yes.’

‘Jack, won’t you tell me how you got them? Since I have been in London everybody has talked about them. I am told they are the property of Lord Darley.’

‘I gave them to you, and you promised to give them back to me whenever I claimed them.’

‘Yes, I did.’

‘And you will keep your word?’

‘Yes.’

Maggie looked at her former lover searchingly. He looked older, and there was a worried look on his face. She wanted to ask him the reason of his strange disappearance, but something in his face chilled her. She went up to her room, took the jewel-case from its hiding-place, came back again, and handed it to Jack.

‘They are all there as I received them from you.’

‘Thanks, Maggie; I knew that I could trust you to keep your word.’

‘I have kept it, but, remember, I shall have to account for what I have done. I have been told that these are the Darley diamonds, and that Lord

Darley, their owner, has disappeared. What shall I say when I am asked where the diamonds are?’

‘Say that you have returned them to the person who lent them to you. Have you told anyone how you got them?’

‘Yes, Lord Darley’s solicitor; and I have shown him your photograph—the one you gave me in New York.’

‘Thanks for the information; and now, Maggie, I’ll say good-night.’

‘Shall I see you again?’

‘Some day, perhaps.’

‘One minute, Jack, before you go: won’t you tell me how you got those diamonds—they are the Darley diamonds?’

‘If they are, the simplest thing would be to ask Lord Darley.’

‘But, Jack, nobody can ask him; he has not been heard of for two years.’

‘That is his business, not mine. At any rate, I lent you the diamonds in New York, I claim them in London, and you have given them back like the straightforward, honest girl I believed you to be when I trusted you with them.’

‘Why did you go away so mysteriously, and never write to me or let me hear of you till now?’

‘Some day you may know that also. Good-night and good-bye.’

Jack Dalmain bent forward and pressed his lips to Maggie’s forehead, and in a moment more he had gone.

The girl flung herself into a chair and sobbed hysterically.

She had a wild feeling that she had seen her lover for the last time, and that there was some mysterious crime connected with the diamonds that had played so strange a part in her little life story.

The next morning she found Mr. Oldfield’s card, and drove to his office at once.

He received her courteously, and inquired with a playful smile if the diamonds were all right.

‘No,’ replied Miss Montressor; ‘I have given them up.’

‘Given them up!’

‘Yes, to the man who lent them to me—the man whose photograph I showed you. He came last night and claimed them.’

‘My dear young lady, this is serious; you ought to have communicated with me first. This Mr.—Mr.——’

‘Dalmain!’

‘Mr. Dalmain might have given us some information as to Lord Darley. He couldn’t have obtained the diamonds without knowing something of him, I presume. Do you know where he is now, this Mr. Dalmain?’

‘No, he gave me no information. He reminded me of my promise, and I kept it, that was all.’

Mr. Oldfield was puzzled. He could still do nothing. Again the Darley diamonds had mysteriously disappeared, but still he was unable to say that their rightful owner had not taken them. It was quite possible that Lord Darley had at some time disposed of them quietly, and that Mr. Dalmain had purchased them in a legitimate way, either directly or indirectly, of his lordship. The heir, Lord Darley’s cousin, had consulted him several times on the matter, but in the absence of proof of wrongful possession, and his lordship’s continuing to make no sign, he had, after consulting with the police, come to the conclusion that nothing could be done.

Miss Montessor went from the lawyer’s office to the Merriment Theatre, and informed the manager that she would not appear any more. She had parted with her diamonds, and was going back to America. Without the diamonds the manager did

not want her, and accepted her resignation, and a week later Miss Montressor sailed for New York, and London saw her no more.

But one day, many months afterwards, while travelling with a theatrical company, she picked up in a hotel in San Francisco a copy of the *New York Herald*, and her attention was arrested by a headline which sent a thrill through every vein—‘Extraordinary Story of an English Lord’—and reading on, she learnt how, after a long disappearance, during which his friends had given him up for dead, a certain Lord Darley had been discovered accidentally by a traveller in South Africa, among a tribe of Zulus, in an out-of-the-way part of the country rarely visited by white men.

His lordship had a strange story to tell. When he came out to South Africa he landed at Port Elizabeth, and there met quite by accident an old acquaintance, a Mr. Dalmain, a wealthy Peruvian of English origin, who had been a distant connection of Lady Darley’s. On the last occasion Mr. Dalmain had been in London he had purchased of Lady Darley, who, unknown to her family, had for some time past been investing large sums of money in disastrous speculations, the famous

Darley diamonds. At that time Mr. Dalmain was engaged to be married to a wealthy American lady, and the diamonds he intended to give her as a wedding present. But the marriage was broken off, and Mr. Dalmain plunged into dissipation and seemed strangely affected in his mind. He was travelling in South Africa for his health, he told Lord Darley, and he agreed to join him in a hunting expedition. After they had been away about a month together, one day, when they were in a wild part of the country far out of the beaten track, Mr. Dalmain and his companion had a slight quarrel. Instantly the former seemed seized with a fit of madness, and before Lord Darley could offer any resistance he attacked him savagely with the butt end of his gun, and left him senseless and apparently dead alone in the bush.

In this condition his lordship was found and captured by the Zulu tribe, who made him a prisoner and carried him away with them. They evidently attached to him some qualities which he did not possess, for he gradually gathered that they looked upon him as a protection from the attacks of white men, and believed that as long as he was with them they would prosper in their attacks upon the tribes with whom they occasion-

ally had warlike engagements. At any rate, they took every precaution against his escape, and so he remained for two years completely cut off from civilization and unable to communicate with his friends, until his accidental discovery by a white traveller led to means being taken to effect his release.

Immediately on Lord Darley's return to civilization his first task, after communicating with his friends in England, was to find out what had become of Mr. Dalmain, and inquiries which were instituted resulted in the discovery that the would-be murderer had resumed his old life, and had in New York made the acquaintance of an actress whom he had presented with the Darley diamonds. He had left her suddenly, the reason being, it was surmised, that he had felt his mania returning, and had purposely gone away and given himself in charge of a doctor who kept a private establishment for the treatment of mental cases. The doctor had been found, and had stated that Mr. Dalmain had been in the habit of coming to him at intervals, generally once a year, and requesting him to take care of him until the mania had passed away, as he dreaded what he might do if he was left to control his own actions. Such cases,



though not common, were well known to specialists in mental diseases.

Mr. Dalmain remained for six months with the doctor, and then announced his intention of travelling in Europe, and it was assumed he had arrived in London at the very time the actress to whom he had given the diamonds was wearing them on the stage of a London theatre. From Lord Darley's solicitor it was ascertained that the actress had been visited by Mr. Dalmain, and had given the diamonds up to him; his reason for getting them away from her being probably that he had learned they were exciting attention, and he fancied that if through her they were traced to him, his connection with the missing Lord Darley might be traced also, and the murder, which he believed he had committed, would be traced home to him.

The *New York Herald* concluded by stating that at the time of writing Mr. Dalmain's whereabouts was unknown, but the diamonds it was believed had been deposited with his solicitor, who had put them in his strong-room for safe custody.

\* \* \* \* \*

A fortnight later Maggie Montessor learnt through the newspapers that Mr. Dalmain had heard of Lord Darley's reappearance, and had,

fearing that he would be arrested, put an end to his own life.

The mystery of the Darley diamonds was explained at last, and Maggie Montressor, who felt her former lover's fate very much, and was desirous of avoiding the notoriety which her own share in the strange life-drama would bring her, left the stage altogether, and, resuming her own name of Clafferton, eventually married a young farmer in her native district, and did her best to forget her former career and the days when she was the envied wearer of the Darley diamonds.

## X.

### *THE JUDGE'S WIFE.*

‘WELL, dear?’ said Lady Morton anxiously, rising, and coming towards her husband as he entered the drawing-room where she was seated alone.

‘Guilty!’ replied Sir Francis Morton, one of her Majesty’s judges.

‘And the sentence?’

‘The only one I could pronounce. But please don’t let us talk of it any more, dear. It has been one of the most painful experiences of my life, and for a time, at any rate, let me try and forget it.’

Lady Morton turned from her husband with a sigh, and sat down by the fire and peered into the glowing embers.

Her husband had that afternoon sentenced a man to death! It was the first time that this

ghastly duty had devolved upon the judge, who, as judges go, was a young man. As counsel for the prosecution, he had metaphorically put the rope round a murderer's neck more than once; but since his elevation to the Bench, this was the first time he had had to pass sentence of death upon a fellow-creature.

'I ought not to have come home to dinner this evening,' thought Sir Francis, as a little later on he sat opposite his young wife at the table, and noticed how pale and distressed she looked. He knew what was passing in her mind. Tender-hearted and sensitive to a degree, Grace Morton was horrified to think that from the mouth of the man she loved and revered there had only a few short hours previously passed the terrible words: 'And you shall be taken to the place from whence you came, and be hanged by the neck until you are dead.'

She had hoped, she had prayed, that it might never be her husband's fate to have this terrible responsibility. When the gentle country girl, the daughter of the Vicar of a quiet little parish in the most romantic portion of the Lake District, had married the eminent Queen's counsel, the idea that he would one day be a judge and try men and

women for their lives had never entered her head. Frank Morton had been a life-long friend of her father's, and a constant visitor during his brief holidays. He had been a widower for many years, the wife of his early manhood having died a few years after their marriage. He was a handsome man and a charming man; and, seeing so little society of any kind, it was no wonder that Grace Ellerslie returned the affection which her father's friend made no effort to conceal. It was an excellent marriage in every sense of the word for the country Vicar's daughter; and she had been very happy, for her husband's tastes, like her own, were simple, and the world of fashion and excitement had no charm for either of them.

And now she was Lady Morton, the wife of Sir Francis Morton, one of her Majesty's judges, and her husband had sentenced a man to death.

It was a miserable little *tête-à-tête* dinner that evening. Scarcely a word passed between husband and wife, and dish after dish was removed almost untouched.

When the servants had left the room, Lady Morton looked up anxiously at her husband, and said:

‘Frank, can’t you do anything?’

‘What can I do, my dear? The case was as clear as possible. I summed up as much in the prisoner’s favour as I possibly could; but the facts were damning, and no jury could possibly have brought in any other verdict. They couldn’t even recommend the poor wretch to mercy.’

‘And the poor man himself—he has protested his innocence all along. Did he say nothing when you—when you—had sentenced him?’

‘Yes; he said, “I am innocent.” But what is that? The guiltiest wretch will protest his innocence to the last—even on the scaffold. It is very rarely that educated men confess, although every effort is made by the chaplain to work upon their feelings and induce them to do so.’

‘Then the man will be hanged?’

‘Grace, Grace! for goodness’ sake, my darling, don’t look at me like that—you distress me beyond measure! God knows, the duty I have had to perform was trying enough; don’t make me more unhappy that I am.’

When Mr. Justice Morton said that he was unhappy he spoke the truth. The emotion he had displayed under the dreadful ordeal in court was perfectly genuine. He had felt, and felt deeply, the responsibility for the first time placed

upon him. He had fully recognised that he was ordering a fellow-creature to be hurried into eternity, and the knowledge that what he had to do would be a terrible shock to his tender-hearted, sensitive young wife had added to his grief.

Lady Morton rose to go. For the first time since they had been man and wife it was a relief to both of them to escape from each other's society.

But before she left the dining-room Lady Morton came to her husband, and laid her hand gently upon his shoulder.

'Frank,' she said, 'if there is anything you can do conscientiously to save this man's life, promise me that you will do it.'

'I promise.'

Left alone, Sir Francis lighted a cigar, and sat back in his chair and stared at the ceiling.

What could he do? This man's case was not one to excite public sympathy. There was very little chance of an appeal to the Home Secretary. The people who always protest against executions and endeavour to obtain a reprieve for murderers might go through the usual performance; but if he were appealed to as the judge who tried the case by the Home Office, what could he say to stay the regular process of the law? Nothing!

And yet he had a lurking idea that the man might be innocent after all. As a judge there was nothing to justify such an idea; but his wife had in some way or other communicated her own frame of mind to him as a man. She had followed the case in the papers, and had all along declared that he might not be guilty. The evidence in the case, he confessed to himself, was fatal to the hope. Her heart, and not her brain, had been worked upon.

Sitting alone in an unhappy and melancholy frame of mind, knowing the effect that this man's death would have upon his wife, the judge mentally went over the whole case again, and summed up the evidence in order to see if there was any possibility of any other theory than that of the guilt of the condemned man.

The facts as sworn to by the witnesses, and in every way corroborated, were simple:

John L'Estrange, a young fellow engaged on his own account in an agency business in the City, had been seen on the night of the 30th of September talking to a girl, the daughter of a small market-gardener near Brentford. They were seen together near the river Brent by a man who knew the girl well—one of her father's hands—and who also



knew L'Estrange, having frequently, a year or two previously, seen them together in company. It was about eight o'clock in the evening when they were seen, and they were apparently quarrelling. The witness overheard the man say, 'It's no use your threatening me ; I can't do any more.' They then walked along by the river until some trees hid them from the witness's sight. An hour later John L'Estrange was proved to have been at Brentford Station. He appeared in a state of considerable excitement and agitation. That night the girl never returned to her home, and early on the following morning her body was found lying by the bank in a shallow part of the river. There were marks of violence round her throat. The girl had evidently been throttled until she was senseless, and had then been pushed into the water.

It was on the information of her father's labourer, one William Stevens, that the police arrested John L'Estrange. They arrested him at his office in the City, and at the same time made a search of the apartments he occupied with his wife and child, an infant of six months, in the neighbourhood of Dalston.

John L'Estrange, when informed of the discovery

of the murder, was horror-stricken. For a time he could not speak, but when he had recovered himself he declared that he was innocent, but admitted, after being cautioned by the police, that he had been in the girl's company on the evening of the crime. Search among the prisoner's papers revealed the fact that for some time past the girl, who had been his mistress previous to his marriage, had been obtaining money of him, threatening to come to his home and make a scandal unless he complied with her requests.

L'Estrange had left her only when her extravagant habits and dissipated ways compelled him to. He would have broken the unhappy connection long before, but he was afraid of the girl. When they parted he gave her all that he could spare, but she squandered it, and eventually returned to her father's home, and for a time seemed to have settled down. But she grew weary of her surroundings, and talked of going to America if she could get the money. Then it was that she began to threaten and annoy her old lover again.

In the girl's boxes at her father's cottage were found letters from L'Estrange, pleading that he was in monetary difficulties; that he had given all he could afford, and urging her not to drive

him to 'do something desperate.' The last letter, dated the day before that of the murder, made the appointment which proved to be the fatal one, and in it the prisoner distinctly stated that at present he was absolutely unable to give her any more money.

This was important, because the contention of the prisoner was that he met the girl, gave her money, and pacified her.

The other evidence bearing strongly upon the prisoner's guilt was his agitation at the railway-station, where several people noticed that his face was swollen and bruised, as though he had been engaged in a struggle, and that his linen collar was crushed, and detached on one side from the collar-stud. A witness came forward who proved that at the railway-station he said to L'Estrange, 'Your collar is undone,' and that the prisoner tried to push it down inside his coat, and the witness then noticed that the one button-hole was torn so that it would not fasten.

The explanation offered on behalf of the prisoner was that he and the girl had quarrelled, and that the girl, who was of a violent and excitable disposition, had flown at him and scratched his face, and in the struggle had seized him by the collar, which

had thus been torn away from the bone stud on one side.

In all cases where there is no eyewitness of a crime the evidence must be circumstantial. If only the accused were convicted whose deed could be proved on the sworn testimony of an eyewitness, then a man would only have to lock himself in a room with his victim, accomplish his act carefully, and walk out and snap his fingers at justice, absolutely unconvictable because no one actually saw him in the act of taking life.

Apart from the fact that no one actually saw John L'Estrange murder his former mistress, the market-gardener's daughter, there was not a single link missing in the chain of evidence on the strength of which he had been condemned.

He went by his own admission to keep an appointment with a woman who was making his life unbearable, threatening his domestic peace, and making money, which he could not spare, the price of a truce of hostilities. He was seen with the woman by the spot where a few hours later she was found dead, and, according to the medical evidence, she had been dead just the number of hours which would carry the period of the crime back to the time at which she and John

L'Estrange were alone together close to the spot at which the body was found. The motive for the crime was a common one, and was self-evident. The opportunity was admitted, and the prisoner came away from the scene of the crime bearing on his own person the marks of a violent struggle, such as would naturally occur when a young and healthy woman found herself in the grip of a would-be murderer.

In opposition to this overpowering array of circumstantial evidence, what was the theory of the defence?

That John L'Estrange had met the girl, and that a quarrel had ensued, and that she had in a fit of violent passion attacked him. That he had given her money—five pounds in gold, he said—and left her. This story of the money was disproved: the girl's purse was still in her possession, but it contained only a few shillings, so that story was untrue. The girl was murdered, there was no doubt about that; she must have been murdered by somebody, and there was everything to prove that that somebody was John L'Estrange.

The judge reviewed the whole story again in his mind, and he went to his study and looked carefully over his notes. There was not to his mind a single

flaw in the evidence. There was not the slightest justification that he could see for any interference with the sentence it had been his duty to pronounce.

He had to confess as much to his wife, and having done so, he begged her to try and dismiss the matter from her mind ; at any rate, not to let it be the subject of any further conversation between them. ' You must promise me this, Grace. Think, my dear, of the painful position in which you place me. If I am to be an honest and upright judge I must put every consideration aside in the administration of justice, even consideration for her whom I love better than everything in the world.'

' Very well, dear,' said Lady Morton quietly, ' if you feel that you can do nothing, I promise. But you must give me leave to act for myself in the matter.'

The judge hesitated.

' My dear, you must remember that, as the wife of the judge who tried the case, for you to move in the matter would be——'

' Can you not trust me to remember your honour and your welfare before anything?'

The judge hesitated no longer. He took his

young wife's face between his hands, and kissed her softly on the brow.

‘Yes, dear, do whatever your good woman's heart tells you to do. I trust you implicitly.’

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days later a lady called at the little house at Dalston, and, avoiding giving her name, but simply stating that she wished to see Mrs. L'Estrange on an important matter, succeeded, after some difficulty, in obtaining an interview.

The young wife, pale, and with her eyes swollen and red with constant weeping, sat in the little parlour, her baby in her arms.

Nervous and hesitating at first, she grew gradually reassured by the gentle manner and sweet voice of her visitor, and freely answered the questions put to her. She understood that the lady was interested in her husband's case, and was working with others to obtain a reprieve. But she had nothing to tell which could be of any service. She was sure he was innocent. He was of a kindly, gentle disposition, and not at all an excitable or a passionate man. She was sure that he could never have done such a cruel and terrible deed. She had seen him during the trial, and he had told her all the circumstances of his unhappy

connection with this woman. It had been broken off long before his marriage. He might have let the girl do her worst, but it was of his wife he thought. He was a devoted husband and they had never had a single quarrel. The day he went to Brentford he kissed her and the child before he went. Could he have done that with murder in his heart? When he came back, though he was agitated at first and told her an untruth, explaining that he had been set upon by roughs who had robbed him of the money he had with him, yet that night he slept quite calmly, and in the morning before he went away to business he played with the child. Could he have done that with murder on his soul? The poor young wife acknowledged that the circumstances looked terribly black against her husband, but she was as certain of his innocence in the matter as she was of her own.

Of course she had no theory as to the murder; she knew nothing of the girl or her friends, or her circumstances. Someone must have killed the girl after her husband left.

But who, and why?

Mrs. L'Estrange shook her head. Her husband's solicitor had been to her, but he could not find the



slightest clue to go upon. People may murder for revenge, or in passion, or for robbery.

The lady bowed her head—that was so. Then she repeated the word ‘Robbery’ out loud. It suggested to her mind just one little point which had not, according to the evidence, been investigated sufficiently.

‘By-the-bye, tell me,’ she said, ‘do you know if, when your husband left you to go to Brentford, he had any money with him? You see, in his letter he distinctly told the girl he could give no more, and none was found on her.’

‘He took money away, because he explained to me that it was of that he had been robbed; that was why he came home all torn and scratched, he told me.’

‘Yes, but wait a minute: he said that he gave this girl five pounds; now did he—we know his story of being robbed is untrue—have so much money about him? Think! Can’t you recollect?’

‘Yes, I am sure that he took money; because I had some bills to pay, and I had put the people off; money had been short, for my husband’s business was slack.’

‘But this day he had money, you say; you are sure?’

‘Yes; he came home early that afternoon, and he gave me five pounds in gold, and when he took it out of his waistcoat-pocket, I saw that he had more. He told me that he had been out with a German gentleman, and sold a large parcel of goods for him to one of the big City houses for cash, and the gentleman had given him ten pounds in cash on account of his commission, as he explained he was pushed for money. It was a piece of good luck, he told me.’

‘And of that other five pounds you knew nothing? You never saw it?’

‘No; he told me it was that he had been robbed of.’

‘Then, as we know he wasn’t robbed, he did in some way get rid of five pounds—the sum he says he gave the girl that night.’

‘Yes, undoubtedly.’

‘Well that, at any rate, is something to go upon,’ said the lady, rising. ‘Be as brave as you can, my poor girl, and let us hope that we may yet prove the truth of your husband’s story.’

As the lady was about to leave, the landlady came into the room. There was a German gentleman anxious to see Mrs. L’Estrange. He had been to the office and found it closed, and the

people in the same building had given him the wife's address. He wished to see her particularly.

‘This is the gentleman, perhaps, who paid your husband that day?’

‘It may be. Will you wait and see him with me? You will be able to hear for yourself what he says, if it is so.’

The German gentleman was shown in. He was excited, and in his excitement his English was more broken than it would probably otherwise have been. He had been travelling, and had only on his return to London heard of the arrest of L'Estrange. He had gone to the office to find out where his relatives were, because he had read the trial, and something very curious had struck him.

On the day of the murder he had paid to L'Estrange ten sovereigns on account of commission. That day he left and went to Manchester; and in the train, feeling in his waistcoat-pocket, he found a sovereign which he knew should not have been there, because in that pocket he had ten sovereigns only, the sum he had drawn at the bank to pay his agent, who asked for the money. But in that pocket he had that morning placed a twenty-mark gold piece, which is exactly the same size as a sovereign, and like it. He had put the

gold piece aside to keep it, as it was rather a curiosity, being one of the few gold pieces coined during the six weeks that the Emperor Frederick was Kaiser, and it had the Emperor Frederick's portrait on it. He was certain that he had given it to Mr. L'Estrange.

It was a slight thing, but he felt it his duty to let the wife know in such a case as this. If a gold German piece of this description had been found on the girl, Mr. L'Estrange had given her money. There might be nothing in his information, but he could not withhold it. It was a trifle, but then trifles in such an affair were valuable.

The lady who had interviewed the wife interposed. She asked Mrs. L'Estrange if such a piece was given her by her husband among the five gold pieces that day? No. Was such a piece in her husband's possession at the time of his arrest? No. The police had given a description of everything found on him at the trial. Then the German gold piece with the Emperor Frederick's portrait upon it was disposed of in some way that fatal evening. Yes, that must have been so.

\* \* \* \* \*

The solicitor for the defence was duly apprised of the circumstance of the German gold coin, and

requested to follow up that slight clue. He went about the business in a careful and systematic manner, and communicated of course with the Home Office and the Police, but the Home Office and the Police didn't place the same value on the new piece of evidence that he did. They didn't see, as no such coin had been found on the murdered woman, that such a coin having been at one time in L'Estrange's possession was in any way in his favour. If it had been found in the possession of the girl, yes. But it wasn't.

There was one person, though, who clung to this slight thread and believed in its strength implicitly, and that was the lady who had heard the story told by the German gentleman to the condemned man's wife.

She went personally to Brentford, she employed people to search in every direction round the spot where the murder had been committed. She had a vague hope that something might be found, though she could not explain to herself why this gold coin should be. But the disappearance of the money which L'Estrange, she now firmly felt convinced, had taken there had impressed itself deeply on her mind. She felt convinced that he was innocent, and that the proof of his innocence lay

in discovery of the coin. At Brentford she made inquiries in a quiet way, and talked to various people about the murder. The general opinion was that but for the labourer who saw the man and woman together that night L'Estrange would not have been condemned. No one else had seen him near the spot or with her. She thought she would like to see this witness—a man named Stevens, and she was told that he was not at work now, as since the trial he had been drinking heavily. It had excited him too much being in London every day, and being interviewed and sent for by all the big lawyer folks and such like, and he'd taken to drink, and been idle since the conclusion of the trial.

‘It'll be his ruin,’ said the shopkeeper, with whom the lady had conversed. ‘Why, the other night he was in the Red Lion the whole evening, drinking with one and another, and yesterday he was too queer to get out, but he sent a neighbour's little boy to the public-house for a bottle of brandy, and gave him a sovereign to pay for it. He must have been well paid by the newspapers for sitting for his portrait and being interviewed, and the queer thing of it was that it wasn't a sovereign he sent, but a foreign gold piece just like one.’

‘A foreign gold piece!’ said the lady excitedly.

‘Yes, a German piece I heard the landlord of the Red Lion said it was, as good as a sovereign in that country, but not here. We don’t have our sovereigns “made in Germany”—not yet at least.’

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the missing coins was found, the only one that could be identified, and it was in the possession of the man who had on his own evidence been near enough to the river to see L’Estrange and the girl together. The man had been drinking heavily since the trial; he had not worked, and he had spent money, and he sent this gold coin to the public-house, never noticing it was not an English sovereign. When an inquiry was made at the place where he lived, the gold coin returned by the landlord was found in his possession. It was a twenty-mark German coin, with the bust of the Emperor Frederick on it.

Questioned as to how he became possessed of it, the man contradicted himself, and was arrested, and the representation made to the Home Secretary at once resulted in a respite being granted to the condemned man. In prison Stevens, conscience-stricken and terrified, confessed to his guilt. He had watched the meeting of the old lovers. He

had seen the quarrel, and the girl's attack on the man; he had heard him implore the girl not to make a scene or to ruin him for the sake of his wife and child, and he had seen L'Estrange give the girl gold, which she held in her hand when he said good-night, and left her.

The sight of gold tempted the man. He was hiding in the trees near the river; the girl, with the gold still clasped in her hand, came towards him into the darkness. In a moment, obeying a sudden impulse, he sprang out on her, seized her by the throat, and tore the money from her hand. But they had struggled out of the shadow of the trees to the river's edge. It was lighter there, and the girl recognised him and gurgled his name. Then he was desperate; he clutched her more tightly round the throat, and throttled the life out of her, and then pushed her backwards into the water and went home.

When the body was discovered, he saw a way of at once diverting suspicion from himself, and swore to what was actually true—the meeting of L'Estrange and the murdered girl.

And circumstantial evidence did the rest, and placed the rope round the neck of the wrong man. Immediately upon the confession of the real



murderer, L'Estrange was graciously granted 'a free pardon' by her Majesty; but neither he nor the trusting, loving woman who welcomed him back with tears of hysterical joy, ever knew how much they owed to the wife of the judge who had condemned him to death.

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THE END.

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[SEE OVER.

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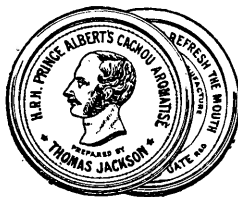
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